Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students: A School Climate Study

Erica Peek

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Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students:

A School Climate Study

by

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In

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Abstract

This qualitative case study focused on the perceptions of 5th grade black males at a suburban neighborhood elementary school in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how the participants felt about their teachers and school community. The theoretical frameworks that informed this study were Critical Race Theory and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Several data gathering techniques (qualitative questionnaire, focus group meeting, and student journals) were utilized and analyzed to describe the participants’ experiences regarding school climate at TES. From the data collected, several themes emerged such as Building Relationships & Classroom Communities, Care, Compassion, & High Expectations, Engaging Instruction, Classroom Management, Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism, and School as Family. This information supports previous research on the education of black males. It also contributes to the literature on the educational experiences of black boys, through their own youthful voices and perspectives. The findings of this study were used to highlight their stories. Stakeholders such as teachers, teacher leaders, school and district leaders, and teacher preparation programs can benefit from the results. The knowledge gained can be used to build teacher capacity. It can also be utilized to begin critical dialogue on how to best serve black boys and assist them in developing the skills and strategies essential for academic success.

Keywords: [black boys, elementary education, school climate, teacher leadership]
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Beck and Laverne Wright. Early on, they instilled the value of education in my siblings and me. Their lessons of hard work and determination have been very instrumental in my life. Without their unconditional love and support, I would not be the woman I am today. They have always been there to support my dreams, encouraging me, and pushing me forward. I cannot put into words the love I have for these two…

Unfortunately, my Daddy did not live to see me complete this degree. He peacefully transitioned from this world into eternity, 8 months ago, while I was in the process of drafting this manuscript. However, I am certain that he is smiling down on me and is telling all of his buddies, up in heaven, how very proud he is of me, his baby girl, and this major milestone. Though this loss was a tough one, I could not give up. Daddy, I feel and have always felt your presence, support, pride, and love for me. You have always been my protector and now you are my angel watching over me and guiding me through this life. You were the reason I was able to stay the course and press on through this doctoral program. I love you Daddy and miss you dearly.

I would also like to thank my husband, Antonio Peek, for his patience, understanding, encouragement, and love always. Thank you for allowing me the sacrifice of time while I worked diligently to complete my “passion project.” Thank you also for reading “your share” of the literature. Thank you for living with and loving a teacher who is also a continuous, lifelong learner. I am forever grateful for your love and support. Your belief and pride in me pushed me
to continue when the grind became tough. Thank you for always standing by my side and being there to help me achieve this lifelong goal.

To my sweet Bria, thank you for the kisses and for saying, “Mommy, ok, it’s time to go to bed,” as I worked to persevere through. The nights were long and the mornings were early, but through it all, you were there. I hope I have been an example to you that you can go after ANYTHING that you want in life – no matter how big and far away it seems. As they say, “If you can dream it, you can certainly do it, my love.” Thank you for helping me make it to the finish line. You cheered me on as I crafted this work, and words cannot express how truly thankful I am for you. I hope that by watching me pursue my dreams, it will encourage you to work hard for yours as well.

This dissertation is also dedicated in memory of Vevelyn M. Moss, a great friend and excellent educator. Vevelyn was a major inspiration to me in the area of continuing my education… way back during our early years in the profession. She sowed the seed.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to the young men that took part in this study. This inquiry would not have been possible without your willingness to engage in the process. I cannot express how much I appreciate each of you and the gift of knowledge and understanding you have provided. Your eagerness to be open and share your thoughts and experiences was critical to the success of this work. I am honored to have had the opportunity to listen and learn from you, because to me, you have always mattered! I want you to know that you all are amazing and your voices needed to be heard! As the weeks dwindle to days, you will be walking the halls of your elementary school, one final time. My hope for you is that you continue to be the bright-eyed, eager scholars that sat before me during our time together. My prayer is that your middle and high school years are just as positive an experience for you, as you have shared about your
elementary years. I encourage you to continue to set goals for yourself and strive to reach them.

Be receptive to life and learn as much as you can. Go forth and be great, young men!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God for allowing me to finish my doctoral study successfully. The Lord has continuously guided and kept me throughout this journey. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Thank you Lord for giving me the peace and courage I needed to persevere through the difficult, challenging times. Thank you for your love, protection, and presence in my life.

During my studies, I have been fortunate to receive encouragement and support from many individuals. I would like to thank my siblings and my entire extended family. I would also like to thank my dear friends; my girls. I love each and every one of you and am thankful for your constant support, belief, prayer, and the many ways you have motivated me to stay the course.

I am also grateful for my school community. This appreciation goes out to my administrators, colleagues, and all faculty and staff. Last, but certainly not least, the children are always my inspiration. They were my main purpose for conducting this research study. I am forever grateful for the way I was supported in this endeavor.

I would also like to thank my Kennesaw State University professors and cohort members for assisting in my growth as a teacher leader. I am appreciative of all the encouragement and constructive feedback offered to me.

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your combined wealth of knowledge. Thank you for the wisdom that you have shared. I pray that
I can be the same support for others, as you have been for me.
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As I spend another spring, Friday evening at home following The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines of sheltering in and quarantining amidst the global Coronavirus pandemic, I find myself with more time for reading for pleasure, one of my first loves. But, I also find that I have more time for consuming the news; more than usual.

On the evening of May 29, 2020, as I view another episode of ABC’s World News Tonight, I am impacted in a way that I will never forget. Today marks the fourth day since the murder of an unarmed George Perry Floyd on Monday, who was killed by police officers while cell phone video footage captured the incident in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As I continue to watch this segment of World News Tonight, it has a different feel from the other broadcasts that I have seen documenting the turmoil and chaos in the nation and beyond surrounding this killing.

On the television screen is Mr. Floyd’s second grade teacher, Dr. Waynel Sexton, reflecting on the type of student he was when she had him in her class back in 1981 at Frederick Douglass Elementary School in Texas. She states that he wanted to become a Supreme Court justice back then and she shares one of his writings and artwork from a Black History project when he was 8 years old. She describes him as a good student who enjoyed participating in the singing and dancing they did in class. She states he enjoyed his friends and that he was a delight to have in her class. As I listen intently, immediately, the names and faces of many of the black males that I have had the pleasure of teaching, throughout my years in education, come to mind. I think of how many of them fit this same description.

As I am thoroughly engaged in this news segment, Mr. Floyd’s teacher makes a powerful statement that resonates with me. Dr. Sexton states, “As teachers, we teach our children to find helpers when we are in trouble.. to find the policeman. I wonder now, as I have been for some
years, what do we teach our young black men? Who are the helpers for the young black men?” (Shay, 2020).

When I hear this statement, it instantly strikes a chord with me and the tears begin to flow. I quickly grab my notebook, write down Dr. Sexton’s comments, and my thoughts, ideas, and feelings. As I write, the thoughts come fast and ferociously. I begin to wonder about the young black males in my own school community. I think about our black male students and their perceptions of their schooling. I wonder how they feel about their teachers and their school. I wonder if they feel that we are there to serve in their best interests. I wonder if they feel safe, listened to, cared for, supported, and as if they belong. This extra time of being quarantined at home, since our school and schools around the country closed abruptly in mid-March, has allowed me the time to sit and reflect; time that I otherwise would not have had - had we not been in the midst of this ongoing pandemic. So many thoughts flood my mind. I have always been interested in how my elementary school community and I can make a positive impact in the lives of all the children we serve, but on this particular day, I am concerned with our black male student population… and so begins the foundation of my inquiry journey into the educational experiences of black males.
CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the country, the state of black males in public schools has been dismal. “The education of black boys has been a topic of discussion for the past four decades. Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have all weighed in on the challenges affecting black male students. Despite the increasing body of research and commentary, however, disparate academic outcomes for this group of learners (compared with students in other demographics) remain” (Howard & Howard, 2021, p. 1; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; Essien, 2017; Wright & Ford, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011). The national research on the education of black boys reflect the data witnessed at this study’s research site, Truth Elementary School (TES). In order to provide confidentiality, the school’s actual name will not be used.

Current Reality

In the southeastern region of the United States, where this study was being conducted, the results from elementary students’ end of grade state assessments factor into the school’s accountability score for the year. Over the past few years, the participating school has seen a decline of a little over 4 percentage points in English Language Arts (ELA) scores schoolwide from 64.06 to 59.69, according to the 2019 state accountability report (see Appendix A). In Mathematics, there was also a decline of about 5½ percentage points schoolwide from 72.87 to 67.46 (see Appendix B). There was no accountability data from 2020 or 2021, due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Truth Elementary School and schools around the nation are dealing with the realizations and ramifications of the ongoing pandemic. They are forced to address issues such as learning loss,
academic gaps, and social emotional needs as they open back up after being shut down abruptly, and shifting back and forth from in person to virtual learning. In addition to that, based on the results from this most recent data, TES can use as much support as possible to help strengthen these content areas across all subgroups. But for this particular inquiry, the focus is on the black male population.

According to the state reporting system, data can be desegregated by gender or race/ethnicity. It cannot be combined as gender and race/ethnicity, as this study entails. Therefore, for our purposes, I looked at the achievement levels by race/ethnicity. According to that same 2019 state accountability data, in ELA black students at Truth Elementary School made progress, but did not meet the improvement target (see Appendix A). In 2018, they scored 53.17 percentage points. In 2019, they showed a slight increase of 0.16 and scored 53.33 percentage points in ELA. Though they showed growth, they did not meet the state target of 54.80.

In Math, black students at TES did not make progress and did not meet the improvement target (see Appendix B). In 2018, they scored 66.55 percentage points. In 2019, they scored 63.43 which was a decline of 3.12 percent. Therefore, they did not meet the state target of 67.77.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted several school years thus far (2019-2020, 2020-2021, and currently 2021-2022). During these years, schools around the country and beyond have had and are still currently adjusting to interrupted learning with having to pivot and quarantine at a moment’s notice. Schools have been between various modes of teaching and learning (face-to-face, virtual, and/or hybrid) for almost two years. Therefore, due to these most current test scores, pre-pandemic, and the lack of data since, it is vital that we find ways to better support this demographic of students.

For the 2021-2022 school year, TES has 3 initiatives on its’ School Improvement Plan:
**Initiative 1-Literacy Goal:** By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the number of students reading on or above grade level will increase by at least 3% points on the Reading district assessment from beginning of the year to the end of the year.

**Initiative 2-Math Goal:** By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the number of students performing on or above grade level in math will increase by at least 3% points on the Math district assessment from beginning of the year to the end of the year.

**Initiative 3-Culture/Climate/Non-Academic Goal:** By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the climate star rating will increase by one star from 4 stars to 5 stars on the state accountability report to ensure a positive and academically challenging learning environment.

The participating school’s academic data, as stated above, is consistent with what is taking place in public schools across the country (NBCDI, 2018; Ladson Billing, 2011; Kunjufu, 2005). In *A Seat at the Table: African American Youth’s Perceptions of K-12 Education* (2018), the United Negro College Fund reports:

There is an enduring crisis in the U.S. education system for black students. Year after year, the data paint a grim picture. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) consistently show gaps between African American and white students in math and reading. And, while the U.S. Department of Education suggests access to quality preschool is important for future success, African American and low-income students are least likely to have access to high-quality early childhood programs (p. 5).
As I reflected on the school data and the state of the world (health crisis, racial injustices, and disparities across so many facets and sectors), I began to think about what I could possibly do to bring about a positive change in my school community. As an educator, because so many areas were out of our control with the reopening of schools amidst a pandemic, I began to consider what I could do to make the world and my school community a better place. I have always been interested in topics related to caring school climates. With our country’s current state, I felt this topic was necessary, timely, and relevant. As educators return to schools, in whatever format is mandated during the pandemic, they will certainly be faced with discussions about the issues transpiring in the world today, and as educators they must be prepared and allow space for those critical conversations to take place. To be successful, educators and all school staff members must promote social and emotional safe spaces for their students, colleagues, and themselves.

Through this research, I sought to allow the voices of young black boys to be heard. Another aim was to build teacher capacity. By having these student participants share their perspectives, it provided insight into how teachers, administrators, and other faculty and staff could better support them in developing the skills and strategies essential to building academic success. Jill Bradley-Levine (2018) describes this as critical teacher leadership:

Teacher advocates challenge other teachers to meet students’ needs more fully while supporting teachers as they try new instructional approaches. Collaborative leadership is a way of working with colleagues that allows teacher advocates to influence their colleagues’ teaching practice toward co-development. Such influence over colleagues’ work has been identified in the research as teacher leadership (p. 54).
Statement of the Problem: Elementary Years & Beyond

This research study focuses on the education of black boys in the elementary school setting. Research and statistics for young black males consistently show a growing achievement gap (UNCF, 2018; Schott Foundation, 2015), overrepresentation in special education classes (Schott Foundation, 2015; Kirkland, 2021, NEA, 2011), inequitably harsh discipline measures: suspensions, expulsions, and incarcerations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; McIntosh et al., 2018; Schott Foundation, 2015; Kirkland, 2021; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997), and startling high school graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Kafele, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011). “Nationwide, research shows the graduation rate for black males is 59 percent — the lowest of any population in the country” (James, 2019; Schott Foundation, 2015). This is a very disturbing statistic.

Kafele (2012) states:

The crisis doesn’t begin when students drop out of school. In far too many cases, it begins before they even enter school. As they move through the grades, black male students as a group have low achievement levels, excessively high suspension and expulsion rates, and a disproportionate number of special education referrals (p. 67).

Most of the research available on the schooling or education of black males is connected to the adolescent or teen years (Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018; Law, Finney, & Swann, 2014; Rudd, 2014; Kafele, 2012; Darenbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Monroe, 2006; Gillborn, 1997). A large amount of what was found related to the middle and high school years, overwhelmingly in regards to disciplinary measures, drop-out rates, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Though
there was a significant amount of research on these areas, there was not as much concerning the elementary, developmental years.

There was also a lack of studies that sought the actual perspectives of black males. As the literature review was being built, it was very rare to find a study that included or investigated the vantage points of young black males on these issues concerning them, and definitely not in the elementary setting (Essien, 2017). Research on the importance of studying black boys in the elementary setting is critical as it could “shine a light” on the educational experiences of these students. “We endeavor to support African American males early in their lives and disrupt the many pipelines that almost guarantee that they will not achieve or experience school and social success” (Wright & Ford, 2016). By intervening early on their behalf, this focus could help narrow the achievement gap, reduce out-of-school suspensions, reduce special education placements, increase gifted program enrollment, boost graduation rates, foster inclusive environments, increase instructional supports, promote modifications to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and collapse the preschool-to-prison pipeline (UNCF, 2018; NBCDI, 2018; Wright & Ford, 2016; NEA, 2011; ETS, 2011; Rashid, 2009). This research inquiry is necessary as it could help to contribute to what is lacking from the study of elementary black boys and their education.

To be clear, this is not the case of all black male students. There are many in this demographic who thrive, succeed, and achieve great things in their educational lifetimes (NAACP, 2015; Allen, 2015; Noguera, 2003). “But, we can’t ignore the statistics that tell us that our education system is failing far too many of our young black males” (Kafele, 2012, p. 67; Howard & Howard, 2021; NCES, 2019; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018, Noguera, 2012). There
is power in the listening ear. Imagine if all educators took the time to listen to their students’ voices what they might find. The possibilities are endless.

**Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions of young black male students in regards to their teachers and school community. When thinking of schools there are several different people to consider. Schools consist of administrators, teachers, teaching assistants, office staff, coaches, counselors, nurses, media specialists, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and custodians. These are the many people that students will come in contact with during their school day. “The interactions and experiences that students have in school have enduring impact on their academic success and psychosocial adjustment later on in life” (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997, p. 326). Of the countless employees in a school, each of them serving in their roles is vital because these are the people that students will encounter in their school community throughout the day. Though there may be certain adults whose roles are more critical to students than others, such as the classroom teacher, they all play a significant part in the lives of children, whether they know it or not.

Teachers and students spend a large amount of time together during the school day, perhaps more than the actual child’s parents may get to spend with them during the day, due to work or other obligations. Therefore, it seemed fitting to examine the influence that teachers and school communities have on their students. That influence can be distinguished as positive or negative. “In the context of the various major influences on children’s well-being, support from teachers seems to have an influence over and above that of parents and peers, and is particularly linked to school outcomes (Myers & Pianta, 2008; Jeffrey, Auger, & Pepperell, 2013). Because this study focuses on the foundational, elementary level of schooling, the goal was to study black males in
5th grade, as they will have spent at least 5-6 years in an elementary school setting, considering they had not been homeschooled for most of this time. This is a school climate study based on the perceptions of this particular demographic. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine the attitudes and perceptions of black male 5th graders at an elementary school in the southeastern United States.

The intention of this work was to allow the participants’ voices to be heard as it relates to their educational experiences in school. “A first step toward changing the conditions that undermine the achievement of black male students is listening to what they have to say about their academic and social experiences in schools” (Duncan, 2002, p. 141; Noguera, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The findings from the data collected could assist and guide teacher leaders and schools with the adjustments or steps needed to ensure they are addressing the needs of young black boys.

**Research Questions**

This study seeks to explore the following research questions:

1. How do black boys in elementary school perceive their teachers?
2. How do black boys in elementary school perceive their school environment?

**Worldview**

The worldview that I brought to this study, as a qualitative researcher, was that of Interpretivism. This model of inquiry is concerned with examining, understanding, and interpreting. It is rooted in people making meaning out of their lives based on their experiences and interactions with others, which brings in multiple perspectives and realities. The construction of reality is a collaboration between the researcher and the participants’
experiences, values, and beliefs. This framework assisted me with “interpreting the social world from the perspectives of those who are actors in that world” (Glesne, 2016, p. 9). While researching and inquiring, the information gathered helped me learn more about these students and expand my understanding.

**Research Tradition**

This inquiry on student perceptions utilized the case study approach. Case studies explore a current phenomena within its real-life context in an in-depth manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). The black male 5th grade participants, in this study, were investigated within their elementary school setting during the 21-22 school year. Their perceptions regarding their teachers and school community were dissected and analyzed. Topics such as classroom and school: environments, rules & regulations, teacher behaviors, and values & attitudes were addressed. The data from the various participants and data gathering techniques (qualitative questionnaire, focus group meeting, and student journals) were coded, analyzed, and compared in order to search for themes and patterns between each of the participants’ responses. Open coding and axial coding were a couple of the coding strategies that were utilized in this process. I used a “hybrid approach using computers for management and eventually coding, but the initial code development was undertaken through making margin notes on paper transcripts” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 210). Collectively, this data provided a glimpse into the experiences of these black male participants.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Critical Race Theory**

As a qualitative inquirer, I tend to lean a bit towards Critical Theory; Critical Race Theory (CRT) to be exact. Critical Theory seeks to emancipate. It feels natural to me that after
examining, understanding, interpreting (Interpretivism) a “thing,” as Stake (2010) describes, that the next obvious step would be to act, *if needed*, based upon the findings. After sharing and presenting findings, it seems as if the next question would be, “So, what can we do to make this better?” Glesne (2016) states “Critical theory researchers are often interested in praxis, or the relationships between thought and action, theory and practice” (p. 11). This is a quality of critical theory researchers, but it is also characteristic of teacher leaders (Levin & Schrum, 2017). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) state that teacher leaders move beyond vision and take action. They have the power and potential to influence significant school change and improved student outcomes.

From the very beginning of their educational careers, research shows that many black boys are at a disadvantage (Wesley & Ellis, 2017). Nevertheless, it is the job of schools to meet these children where they are, supporting them, and insisting they strive to be the best they can be. “The education of all students despite initial achievement level or environmental risk factors is the responsibility of the instructional staff and school administration to overcome” (Capraro et al, 2009, p. 51). In other words, no matter how students arrive to the school building, the job of the adults in that building are to do their best to meet the needs of these students that have been placed in their care. Schools have to take accountability for the role they may play in extinguishing the spirits of young black males (Wright & Ford, 2016; Howard & Howard, 2021; Kirkland, 2017; Ladson, 2011).

Critical Race Theory first came about in the field of law, in the 1980’s, by Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman when attempting to address race and racism in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Duncan, 2002; Roberts, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Later in the 1990’s, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F.
Tate used those same principles in the field of education as frameworks for research and they are still currently being used to this day. Various aspects of education are examined with CRT such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, funding, discipline, scheduling, etc.

“From the perspective of CRT, the plight of black males in schools is an expression of the racism that is endemic to North American society (Duncan, 2002). Critical Race Theory seeks to change the world. “CRT focuses on ways in which racism is so embedded in society that it appears normal for many, and it portrays race as a socially constructed means to identify and classify people” (Glesne, 2016, pg. 11). Several studies mention poverty, deficit thinking/perceptions of teachers towards black males, and teachers/schools lack of knowledge about cultural diversity as factors contributing to this academic epidemic or “educational lynching,” as it has been more strongly termed by Carter G. Woodson (Woodson, 1933; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018; Jeffers, 2017; Capper, 2015; Staats, 2014; Hooks & Miskovic, 2011). For example, “Educators who find African American males as threatening may overreact to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if their perceptions are paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction” (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, 2016, p. 1), and therefore the punishment these students receive may be harsher compared to their counterparts. Instances like this contribute to the startling statistics of black male students (Kirkland, 2021, NCES, 2019; UNCF, 2018; Schott Foundation, 2015; NEA, 2011).

In this particular study, CRT will be used as a tool to “define, expose, and address educational problems” (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This framework will be utilized to explore its possible connections to black boys at TES. It may help to identify possible inequities within this educational institution.
By linking CRT to education, this can foster connections of theory to practice and activism on issues related to race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Activism and advocacy are also characteristics of teacher leadership. It is imperative for teacher leaders to learn to speak up and voice their concerns about policy issues that affect them, their students, colleagues, and communities. “Teachers’ voices are often silent, yet their perspectives need to be heard by all stakeholders attempting to improve schools. Ultimately, this work has the potential to make a difference in the bottom line – student learning” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 102; NEA, 2011). Teacher leaders who want to advocate for change and/or social justice can organize into groups to influence policies at the local, state, and national levels. They can share their perspectives in regards to educational issues and policies. Advocacy is defined as “the process of supporting a person, group, cause, idea, or policy, and benefits individual children and groups of children and families” (Grant & Ray, 2019). Teachers voices and perspectives must be heard at the local, state, and national levels in regards to educational policies if they are to see improvement in student achievement.

Figure 1: Model of Teacher Leader Practices and School Supports (Cassata & Allensworth, 2021)
According to Ladson-Billings (2013), Capper (2015), and Parker & Lynn (2002), the main tenets of Critical Race Theory involve:

- **a belief that racism is normal or ordinary in the US** - racism, both conscious and unconscious is a part of American life
- **interest convergence** - significant progress for blacks is achieved only when the goals of blacks are consistent with the needs of whites
- **race as a social construction** - human beings are biologically quite similar, however humans have constructed social categories that rely heavily on random genetic differences like skin color, hair texture, and eye shape, etc. These differences have been used as a means for creating a hierarchy and ideology of white superiority
- **intersectionality** - the consideration of race along with the intersection of a person’s many other identities and differences (for ex. class, gender, national origin, ability, religion, sexuality, etc.) and how this plays out in various settings
- **voice or counter-narrative** - a method of storytelling that challenges the dominant narrative; a contrasting story

When discussing the narrative/storytelling or “truth-telling” component of CRT, Delgado (1989), as cited in Parker & Lynn (2002), states “only through listening can the conviction of seeing the world one way be challenged, and one can acquire the ability to see the world through others’ eyes.” This research inquiry into the educational experiences of black male elementary students allows me the opportunity to do just that – listen to their voices.

Parker & Lynn (2002) emphasizes:
CRT narratives and storytelling provide readers with a challenging account of preconceived notions of race, and the stories are sometimes integral to developing cases that consist of legal narratives of racial discrimination. The thick descriptions and interviews, characteristic of case study research, not only serve illuminative purposes but also can be used to document institutional as well as overt racism (p. 11).

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is also a theory that will be utilized to inform this study. Used in the field of psychology, according to Maslow (1970), humans have five categories of needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Physiological needs are at the bottom of the pyramid. This level includes essential biological needs such as food, water, air, and shelter. Safety needs are on the second level, and this level reflects the needs for safety, protection, and stability. Love and belonging needs are located on the third level of the hierarchy. They represent the human desire for affectionate relationships with friends, partners, family, or even a sense of community. In other words, a sense of connection. Esteem needs are on the fourth level of the pyramid. This level includes the need for respect, self-esteem, recognition, feelings of accomplishment, appreciation, and approval from others. Self-actualization is the highest level of the pyramid, and refers to the continuous desire to develop one’s fullest potential (Maslow, 1970; Woolfolk, 1998; Jones & Jones, 2004; McLeod, 2020). Maslow’s theory is that the higher needs (self-actualization and esteem) of the hierarchy will develop when the lower needs (physiological, safety, and love) have been achieved.
Applying Maslow’s hierarchy to the educational setting can be found in schools across the country. For example, school breakfast and lunch programs, funded through federal and state aid, are attempts to meet students’ physiological needs so learning can occur. There is also a requirement that teachers and other adults in the school setting provide safety and security for all children, for example by being mandated reporters of neglect and child abuse. Schools also try to provide a sense of belonging through extracurricular activities, clubs, and programs.

Maslow suggests that for students to have energy for learning, their basic personal needs must be met (Jones & Jones, 2004). This theory could be beneficial in understanding the reasons students do what they do to meet their needs. This recognition of human needs can be useful in
helping students to modify their behaviors. “Unproductive behavior is therefore not viewed as an
indication of a bad child, but rather as a reaction to the frustration associated with being in a
situation in which one’s basic needs are not being met” (Jones & Jones, 2004). Maslow’s
Hierarchy of Needs and Critical Race Theory were two useful lenses in this study, as they both
promote the idea that children need social environments that support their academic and personal
growth.

**Definition of Significant Terms**

For this research inquiry, the following list of terms are defined and used throughout the
study:

**Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs** – a theory suggesting that humans have a hierarchy of
needs ranging from lower-level needs for survival and safety to higher-level needs for
intellectual achievement and finally self-actualization. Self-actualization is Maslow’s term for
self-fulfillment, the realization of personal potential (Woolfolk, 1998).

**Black** – of or relating to any of various population groups of especially African ancestry often
considered as having dark pigmentation of the skin, but in fact having a wide range of skin
colors (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Throughout this study, the terms, “Black” (race) and
“African American” (ethnicity) will be used interchangeably when discussing Black
people/culture.

**Critical Race Theory** – a theory that focuses on ways in which racism is so embedded in
society that it appears normal for many. It portrays race as a socially constructed means to
identify and classify people (Glesne, 2016).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy** – a theoretical model for pedagogical practice that not only
addresses student achievement, but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural
identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching/Pedagogy** – a term coined by Dr. Geneva Gay that refers to teachers' strategies and practices. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy** – requires that pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. A pluralistic society, we must remember, needs both within-group cultural practices (in the case of language, say, Spanish or African American Language or Navajo or Samoan) and common, across group
cultural practices (in the case of language in most institutional settings in the United States, Dominant American English) to exist and thrive (Paris, 2012).

**Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline** – the insidious relationship between what happens to black males in school and their placement in the nation's penitentiaries. For example, black students are far more likely to be suspended or expelled than their white peers. These disparities begin the process of pushing students out of school at very young ages, hurting both their opportunities to access high quality early education, and their overall educational experiences once they enter the K-12 system. It runs from preschool settings through elementary and middle schools, into the high schools from which young black men continue to drop out in staggering numbers, and ultimately into federal and state prisons (Rashid, 2009; Wesley & Ellis, 2017; National Black Child Development Institute, 2018).

**School Climate** – refers to the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children's cognitive, social, and psychological development. These interactions include those among staff, between staff and students, among students, and between home and school (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997).
CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The History of Educating Black Boys

Historically, the education of black students in schools has been an issue. In 1933, in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Dr. Carter G. Woodson wrote about the experiences of black students. In the first two chapters, he stated that schools have failed to nurture and support the strengths and skills of black students. He explained the various ways in which he felt students were not being properly taught. He described how students were being influenced to leave their “blackness” behind, and assimilate or adapt to the dominant culture in order to be successful in school, and therefore life (Woodson, 1933; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018; Jeffers, 2017; Hooks & Miskovic, 2011).

Almost 40 years later, in 1972, Phyllis Wiggins witnessed some of the same occurrences as Dr. Woodson. She urged educators in *Redirecting the Focus on the Black Student* to “take another look at how we are training black pupils” (Wiggins, 1972, p. 541). In this article, she spoke about how progress had been made with the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, in 1954, establishing that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. This was a start towards trying to provide equal educational opportunities for all in U.S. schools. But, after her acknowledgement of the country’s growth, Wiggins immediately moved on to share the disadvantages she has seen. She described her observations as students’ learning and progress being wasted or neglected, and a lack of demand or low expectations for these students. She asserted that “the black student has a right to be educated properly for the society in which he lives” (Wiggins, 1972).
During my studies of the related literature, as the years seem to pass, the authors’ appeals and requests for adequate education for black male students seem to get more and more urgent. In 1991, almost 20 years after Wiggins’ article was published in *Educational Leadership*, Willie Wright made his plea for the education of black males in that same publication. In his article, *The Endangered Black Male Child*, Wright succinctly explained the dilemma facing black males in America as he listed a variety of alarming statistics of that day and time.

Wright (1991) states:

The plight of the African American male in America continues to be that of an endangered species. No support group has yet appeared to prevent the extinction of this valuable human resource. The media provide us daily with the facts (statistics)… And the list could go on and on. Yet, although we often read about well-heeled individuals who lead groups of influential citizens on quests to save the manatee, crocodile, bald eagle, the Everglades, Grand Canyon, alligators, whales, the petrified forest, the Sequoia trees, no visible group seems to be interested in expending any energy to save the African-American male (p. 14).

As I read Wright’s article, I could feel his passion for this topic. His firmness and insistence resonated with me. He closed by maintaining that we should “make every effort to preserve the African American male… before his threatened extinction becomes a reality” (Wright, 1991, p. 16).

In 2006, Jerlando Jackson and James Moore III wrote *African American Males in Education: Endangered or Ignored?* They expressed the same sentiments as Wright. They spoke of how the negative stereotypes black male students are often faced with impact the way they see themselves. In this article, the authors wrote about achievement gaps, the rate at which these
students are suspended or expelled compared to their peers, and how they are underrepresented in gifted programs and advanced classes. In the conclusion of the article, they ask readers to “ponder whether African American males have been endangered or ignored in education” (Jackson & Moore, 2006, p. 203).

The National Education Association (NEA) expressed this same sense of urgency in an article entitled Race Against Time: Educating Black Boys in 2011. Like the countless articles before it, this text shared the daunting statistics related to black males in various regards. But, they also went on to include some schools that are doing some promising work of supporting black males in being successful in school. The authors shared a variety of ways in which educators and school leaders can foster a positive learning environment for black male students, such as through cultural responsiveness and school-home partnerships.

The authors also shared an open, honest discussion that took place between four friends, now in college, about their experiences growing up as black students. It was a very candid conversation that allowed the reader to get a glimpse of these students’ personal experiences, even from the earliest years of their schooling. It was quite evident that even during their early elementary years, these students’ awareness of the racial inequities that were taking place in their classes at the time, did not go unnoticed, even by the youngest members in that educational institution. Though these children did not have the terminology for it, it was evident they understood exactly what was taking place in their classrooms.

In The Stereotype Within, Marc Elrich explained that the legal barriers that once existed for educating children of color, for ex. Brown vs. Board of Education, did not and could not undo the attitudes and actions of a society steeped in racism. Though the words and actions of the adults in the building may not be expressed explicitly, they may be implied implicitly and felt by
young, impressionable students, as these children are not naïve or unaware of the circumstances surrounding them.

In 2022, eighty-nine years after Woodson’s *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, many of the same pleas and urgings for black boys to be educated in an effective manner still exist. King (1991) agrees stating “It is worth noting that a tradition of critical African American educational scholarship exists which can be incorporated into teacher preparation courses.” Currently, scholars such as Gloria Ladson- Billings, Pedro Noguera, Geneva Gay, Django Paris, David Kirkland, Tyrone Howard, and so many more, consistently and continuously advocate for the education of black males in America.

**The Startling, Staggering Statistics**

According to the Schott Foundation (2015), the estimated national graduation rate for black males was 59%, compared to 65% for Latino males and 80% for white males. In regards to graduation rates in the state of Georgia, that trend remains: black males 55%, Latino males 57%, and white males 71%. Even more disturbing, this same Schott Foundation report displays our district’s black male graduation rate as 29%.

In *A Seat at the Table: African American Youth’s Perceptions of K-12 Education* (2018), the United Negro College Fund reported “Year after year, the data paint a grim picture.” They state “Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) consistently show gaps between African American and white students in math and reading” (UNCF, 2018). The Schott Foundation describes findings that are pretty consistent with the UNCF. They state “Grade 8 NAEP data show that black males trail both their white and Latino peers. White males outperform black males in reading by 26 percentage points and 32 percentage points in
mathematics” (Schott Foundation, 2015). In the state of Georgia, this achievement gap data was also present with white males outperforming black males in reading by 22%, as well as, in math by 32%.

Nationally, black males’ out of school suspension rates are at least three times higher than their Latino and white peers: 18% for black males, 6% for Latino males, and 5% for white males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Schott Foundation, 2015; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). According to these same data sources, in the state of Georgia, the suspension rates are relatively the same: 17% for black males, 7% for Latino males, and 5% for white males. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights shared in their 2015–2016 Civil Rights Data Collection: School Climate and Safety report that “Black male students represented 8% of enrolled students and accounted for 25% of students who received an out-of-school suspension” (p. 13). This same national school climate document stated that “Black male students represented 8% of enrolled students and accounted for 23% of students expelled” (Office for Civil Rights, 2018). Students that are suspended or expelled from school miss out on critical learning and opportunities for academic growth, which contributes to the achievement gap data. “An unforeseen consequence of these disciplinary actions is that once black male students experience this type of punitive response it becomes more difficult for schools, and even society, to view them as having academic or professional potential (Jeffers, 2017). In other words, when these students experience disciplinary measures, deficit views about their academic value or negative reputations may begin to be developed about them by those in their school community.

Following suspensions and expulsions, the literature tends to progress to incarceration data. The UNCF expressed “Students who are suspended are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out of
school or become engaged with the criminal justice system. The consistent discipline
disproportionality for African American boys not only impedes college readiness, but further
reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline” (UNCF, 2018; Wright & Counsell, 2018; Jeffers, 2017;
is a term used to express the policies and practices schools engage in to push students of color
out and on a pathway to prison (National Education Association, 2016; Jeffers, 2017; Staats,
2014). “As some African American boys are continuously suspended or expelled from school,
they may perceive prison as an extension of their punishment from public schools and as
subsequently supporting the internal mechanisms of the school-to-prison pipeline” (Jeffer, 2017;
Staats, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). Some of these students begin to internalize the deficit views
that are surrounding them (Challenger, Duquette, & Pascascio, 2020; Freidus & Noguera, 2017;
Elrich, 1994).

According to Dr. E. Ann Carson (2020), a statistician with the U.S. Department of Justice:
Bureau of Justice Statistics, “the imprisonment rate of black males (2,203 per 100,000 black
male U.S. residents) was 5.7 times the rate of white males (385 per 100,000 white male U.S.
residents).” The data also revealed that “black males ages 18 to 19 were 12 times as likely to be
imprisoned as white males of the same ages, the highest black-to-white racial disparity of any
age group in 2019” (Carson, 2020).

In schools, black males are overrepresented in the least desirable areas: discipline and special
education and underrepresented in the most desirable aspects: gifted and advanced placement
classes (Jeffers, 2017; Schott Foundation, 2015; Noguera, 2012; NEA, 2011). The National
Center for Education Statistics (2019) reports that the dropout rates of 16 - 24 year olds was
6.8% for black males and 4.7% for white males. Carl Upchurch, an elementary school dropout,
would argue that these disparities take place even earlier in the life of a young black male in his text *Convicted in the Womb: One Man’s Journey from Prisoner to Peacemaker*. “The crisis doesn’t begin when students drop out of school. In far too many cases, it begins before they even enter school” (Kafele, 2012; Upchurch, 1997). Upchurch discusses the societal systems or barriers that have been put in place that cause black males and their families to feel the need to fight for survival. After serving many years in the federal prison system, Upchurch became a social activist, author, and educator. He went on to make significant contributions in his local community and beyond. His life and work are a testament to the fact that the fundamental, elementary years are crucial to the success of all children, especially black boys.

Though the previous statistics are daunting, there is one more that is even more unsettling. In the *Civil Rights Data Collection - Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education* (2014), preschool discipline was examined. It was found that “Racial disparities in discipline begin in the earliest years of schooling. Black students represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 42% of preschool students suspended once, and 48% of students suspended more than once” (Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Wright & Ford, 2016; National Black Child Development Institute, 2018; UNCF, 2018). These statistics are very disheartening, but there is always hope. This research study seeks to do something that has rarely been done before; listen to the voices of those most impacted by these negative narratives: black boys.

**Elementary Schools and the Black Male Student**

Throughout schools in America, black boys tend to be viewed through the least desirable, stained lens. Many times, notions of them being deficient and defiant have preceded them. “Difficult, at-risk, bad, trouble-maker, dangerous, up-to-no-good, devious, wild, disruptive, excessively aggressive, and off-task” are just a few of the terms or negative labels that are

In his article, *From Brilliant Baby to Child Placed At Risk: The Perilous Path of African American Boys in Early Childhood Education*, Hakim Rashid (2009) discusses the transformations in identity that young black males go through during one of the most defining, foundational times in their lives; the preschool and early elementary years.

Rashid (2009) states:

> These brilliant little minds typically enter preschool at age three with the innate curiosity and motivation that characterize their age cohort, and often reflect the psychomotor precocity that has been well-documented in infants of color (Werner, 1972). They emerge from this six-year period and head into fourth grade with the lowest reading levels; the lowest expectations from teachers; and the highest suspension, expulsion, and special education referral rates of any group of children in the United States. (p. 347).

This early elementary time period is when little black boys are considered “cute” (Ladson Billings, 2011; Kunjufu, 2005). The focus, Gloria Ladson Billings states, seems to be on their cuteness, but not their intellectual capabilities. But, as Rashid previously expressed, “This notion of little Black boys as cute does not last long. Before long they are moved to a category that resembles criminals. Their childhood evaporates before they are eight or nine-years-old when teachers and other school officials begin to think of them as men” (Ladson Billings, 2011; Rashid, 2009; Noguera, 2003).
In this article, Rashid goes on share the previously stated statistics about the rate at which black male preschoolers are suspended or expelled from their schools at this early stage in their educational career. When students are isolated or excluded from the classroom or school routinely, it can have an influence on them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and definitely academically (Wright & Ford, 2016; National Black Child Development Institute, 2018; Freidus & Noguera, 2017). Their peers may begin to believe the negative labels or terms used to describe them or more importantly, these students may begin to internalize these words and take them on as a part of their self-image. In the elementary setting, where students are mostly self-contained with one teacher from one year to another, these labels can travel with a student throughout their foundational years and beyond (National Black Child Development Institute, 2017; Wright & Ford, 2016; Ladson Billings, 2011).

A plethora of research has been written about the school-to-prison pipeline when referring to black males. “There is now a preschool-to-prison pipeline that is becoming increasingly apparent. It runs from preschool settings through elementary and middle schools, into the high schools from which young African American men continue to drop out in staggering numbers, and ultimately into federal and state prisons” (National Black Child Development Institute, 2018; Wesley & Ellis, 2017; Rashid, 2009). Wright & Ford (2016) describe these occurrences as learning denied. “These disparities begin the process of pushing students out of school at very young ages, hurting both their opportunities to access high quality early education, and their overall educational experiences once they enter the K-12 system” (Wright & Ford, 2016; Tatum, 2021). The sooner we can disrupt or dismantle these systems, the better, before they have a lasting effect on these students and the remainder of their academic career.
The current context of elementary education for black boys in America is discouraging as many schools feel the need to “control black male bodies at all times” (Ladson Billings, 2011; Howard & Howard, 2021; Jeffers, 2017; Monroe, 2005; Enteman & Rojecki, 2001). When it comes to black boys there seems to be a focus on discipline and compliance, at the expense of learning or academics (Wright & Ford, 2016; Ladson Billings, 2011). In many ways, these students begin to feel confined or as if they are in prison. Schools state that they are simply trying to maintain order and discipline (Howard & Howard, 2021; Ladson Billings, 2011; Jeffers, 2017; Wright & Ford, 2016; Monroe, 2005), but there has got to be a better way to manage behaviors and still educate black male students.

In recent years, several programs, conferences, podcasts, blogs, books, and articles have been created to explore the challenges related to educating black males; mostly at the secondary and high school levels. On January 20, 2009, the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States, an African American male, took place. A day many never thought they would see come. This, like the earlier U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1954, gave a lot of people hope that the country was moving towards being a more equitable society. President Barack Obama would go on to serve two terms (2009 – 2017) as leader of the free world.

Under President Obama’s leadership, an initiative was established to address the educational issues facing black male students. With all that President Obama was contending with during his administration, he had young men of color on his mind. In 2014, shortly after the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teen walking home from the store in Sanford, Florida, and the acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman, President Obama signed a new White House initiative entitled My Brother’s Keeper (MBK). This policy was created in an effort to empower young men of color to reach their full potential.
President Obama collaborated with a diverse team (leaders in philanthropy, business, government, faith, and media) on this project. “The challenges facing boys and young men of color are broad and multidimensional, and so must be the team we bring to the table to begin fostering solutions” (Jarrett & Johnson, 2014). The MBK initiative, like many others around the country, such as the African American Male Initiative (AAMI), were created in an effort to try to uplift the outcomes of black males (University System of Georgia, 2021; Augusta University, 2021). The fact that this topic of empowering young marginalized men of color to aspire to greatness was being discussed on a national level was encouraging. It felt like a huge acknowledgement of the issue; a form of validation if you will.

Schott Foundation (2015):

During the launch of the MBK initiative, President Obama noted that MBK is simply about “Helping more of our young people stay on track.” Those who accept this challenge must commit to building the infrastructure to track where young people, specifically Black males, are going—not just the negative places, but the positive as well. If we are indeed going to be our brothers’ keepers, we must start by ensuring that their assets are just as visible as their deficits. We must ensure that the nation is aware of the true contributions and progress that they are making as much as they are aware of the problems they face (p. 23).

Though there is an abundance of research on black males and their education at the middle and high school levels, this study focuses on black boys in the elementary setting and their perceptions of school, as it is an area that has been largely overlooked in the field of research. These foundational years in a student’s life can have a huge impact on their educational success and life outcomes.
Promising Practices for Educating Black Males

Drawing from past and present research devoted to this work, there are several strategies that educators and schools may find beneficial in supporting black boys in their educational endeavors. The literature suggests that educators examine or check their biases and adjust their deficit thinking when it comes to working with diverse learners (Howard & Howard, 2021; Jackson et al., 2021; McIntosh et al., 2018; Kirkland, 2017; Freidus & Noguera, 2017; Capper, 2015; Staats, 2014; NEA, 2011). Deficit thinking is thinking less of others, that you believe are different from you or different from the norm. Deficit thinking mentality is very likely to happen when teachers have not had exposure to other cultures and languages (Gainer & Larrotta, 2010). Therefore, these educators have relied on sources such as media, peers, family, friends, and church to shape their thinking of other cultures. The deficit model is a negative view about students and their families (Grant & Ray, 2019). Categorizing students based on their race/ethnicity such as lazy, unintelligent, and bad are all examples of deficit thinking and can be very damaging to the educational process.

Deficit thinking can be very destructive in the classroom. It affects teaching and learning greatly. Many educators tend to ignore these critical issues because they do not want to cause conflicts, especially in regards to race and ethnicity. Some want to focus strictly on the curriculum and instruction; subject matter, and not the cultural diversity that needs to be addressed in their classrooms, at the detriment to themselves and their students (Michie, 2007; Milner & Howard, 2013; Kirkland, 2021). “To reach students, teachers must acknowledge and be willing to confront oppression in school and society. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is a way to address these mismatches between teaching styles in the classroom and the home and community culture of students” (Green & Stormont, 2018; Howard & Howard, 2021; Staats,
2014; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Ware, 2006; Monroe, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Kohl, 1994). Educators must be trained on effective strategies and practices for working with culturally diverse learners. As Paris (2012) describes, it is a way to make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students. It is a way of sustaining and maintaining the cultural aspects of diverse learners, while providing them access to the dominant culture. It is an integration of students’ interests and culture, and the required curriculum. Paris writes that we need to push for education that honors the cultural practices of students and their communities.

Another example of this deficit type of thinking has to do with pitying students instead of challenging them (Michie, 2007). Ladson-Billings (2002) stresses that, of course, “being aware of students’ outside school challenges is essential. But feeling sorry for them and allowing them to not learn – granting them permission to fail – is something we must actively guard against.” She states that teachers must understand their backgrounds and show compassion, but also provide them with the tools necessary to push against the negativity in their life. Deficit thinking is very harmful because some students may begin to internalize this inaccurate mentality of themselves and their culture (Challenger, Duquette, & Pascascio, 2020; Freidus & Noguera, 2017; Elrich, 1994).

These negative thought patterns can be dealt with in classrooms and schools in several ways. “As educators, we have to intentionally counter that for our students by filling the gaps of knowledge and the gaps in teacher education literature” (Michie, 2007; Milner & Howard, 2013). Educators must be inquisitive of the family backgrounds of their students and the social and economic landscape of the school’s neighborhood. They should read articles and books, and participate in professional learning related to the areas in which they have weaknesses. Educators
must dig deeper into understanding the learning styles of black boys. They can dialogue with colleagues who seem to be knowledgeable or successful where they are lacking.

Howard & Howard (2021) suggests that when educators are working with black boys, they make a conscious effort to focus on assets instead of deficits.

Howard & Howard (2021) state:

Black boys possess a wealth of intellect, wisdom, and curiosity, and have a deep desire to do well in school. When school personnel recognize that Black boys possess deep funds of knowledge and a tremendous cultural wealth, they can learn more about the various forces that shape their lives—not just the challenges they face, but also their values, interests, ambitions, cultural traditions, family histories, out-of-school learning opportunities, and more. Educators can then leverage those resources both in and out of the classroom (p. 24).

Adopting a culturally relevant and responsive style of teaching is a means to battle deficit thinking. “Research on culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrates that successful teachers pay careful attention to who their students are, where they come from, and how they learn and interact within the classroom as they devise strategies to guide children’s growth” (Freidus & Noguera, 2017). These educators challenge deficit thinking by “making students’ lives and experiences an explicit part of the curriculum” (Michie, 2007). They don’t ignore or gloss over issues concerning culture and race, they tackle them head on with their students, so that students see them as a willing and caring participant in the learning process. This is a way to “interrupt the cycle” of deficit thinking as discussed by Gainer & Larrotta (2010).
David Kirkland (2021) agrees with the idea of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies, but he adamantly insists that these teachings must go a step further into the act of naming race because race matters. He suggests that “unnaming is an act of masking.” It allows for the clumping together of all other cultures, that are not white, though the histories are different.

Kirkland (2021) states:

From the perspectives of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), we are not the same. It is only in opposition to whiteness that we have been forced together, to let go of our difference, so that we might together endure the extreme forces of white supremacy. Notwithstanding, we hold very different histories. We require different treatments to our problems because our problems, though in some cases similar, are not the same. Still, it should be said that a pedagogy for Black people does not mean that pedagogy should be only for one group of people. Other racial pedagogies (plural) should exist alongside a pedagogy for Black people, just as students of various racial backgrounds exist alongside one another. The point is not to collapse unlike racial groups into overarching categories that erase them, but to offer, in this case, educators of Black students a specific framework for educating Black students (p. 65)

Kirkland calls for a culturally responsive and sustaining black pedagogy. He explains that he uses this phrase to “name, signal, locate, mark, and distinguish it as a pedagogy for black students who could not find themselves in the teaching, those students who were descendants of enslaved Africans who could still be found searching for their and their ancestor’s freedom” (p. 66). In his article, Kirkland suggests that “a pedagogy for black people” be established to nurture
the black self. He describes it as a way for black lives to matter in education, therefore unmasking that which has been invisible in teaching and learning (Kirkland, 2021).

Helping prospective and practicing teachers with understanding the role culture (their own and others) plays and the ways it functions in education is definitely beneficial (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Kirkland, 2021; Paris, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Gay, 2002). “We can challenge this negative mentality by offering more professional learning concerning race, ethnicity, class, and gender through schools and districts, especially since most teacher preparation programs only offer one diversity or multicultural course,” which is clearly not enough (Gainer & Larrotta, 2010; Milner & Howard, 2013). This extra support and guidance could make an impact on how educators interact with black students and their families. It could assist with removing or adjusting anything that hinders educators from connecting with black boys. Educators must be mindful and self-assess their attitudes, in an effort to get rid of any barriers that may exist as they seek to help their students reach their highest potential. “Teachers who are provided training and experience in various forms of diversity are likely to be more appreciative of differences and empathetic to the experiences and needs of their students and their families” (Whitford & Addis, 2017; Gay, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). This is where meaningful dialogue and learning can take place and perhaps the gaining of a new knowledge, understanding, or perspective. Educators must look inward and make themselves aware of any shortcomings to become culturally responsive educators of black boys.
The Impact of School Climate

School, home, and community have a definite influence on students and the way they feel about education (Walker, 2016; Educational Testing Service, 2011; Bencivenga & Elias, 2003). They play a key role in the life of a child. Teachers, parents, and others, such as the environment and media are all very instrumental in the education of a student. “Next to home, schools probably exert the single greatest influence on how students see themselves and their abilities. Most public school children spend over a thousand hours per year in school” (Purkey, 1978; Roberts, 2010). Therefore, it is extremely critical that the adults in charge seek to make students’ school experiences positive and beneficial ones. Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie (1997) describe
school climate as “the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children's cognitive, social, and psychological development.” Research consistently shows that students learn best when they are in a school in which they feel safe, supported, connected, and accepted (GADOE, 2021; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018; Walker, 2016; Educational Testing Service, 2011; Bencivenga & Elias, 2003).

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs explains that if our students most basic needs have not been met, then they are unlikely to be academically successful in school (Woolfolk, 1998; Jeffrey, Auger, & Pepperell, 2013; Essien, 2017; McLeod, 2020). Those most basic needs consist of physiological needs (food, water, shelter, and rest) and safety needs (safety and security). But we cannot forget about their psychological needs, such as belonging (ex. building relationships). “Feeling a sense of belonging at school is related to positive academic expectations, stronger motivation, and better grades for ethnic minority students as well as for students with special academic needs” (Brown, 2019; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018, Emdin, 2012). It is critical that students feel like they belong and are accepted in the educational setting.

Lawrence Jackson and his colleagues (2021) conducted a study to examine the extent to which school climate impacted the relationships between black males’ math identity and math outcomes.

Jackson et al (2021) state:

Findings from this study supported the hypothesis that school climate partially mediates the relationship between math identity and math outcomes for black males. The findings are consistent with previous literature that highlights how impactful school climate can be for black males’ academic identification (McMillian et al., 2016) and educational outcomes (Haycock, 2001) and extend this work by testing math identity and outcomes of
black males specifically… Findings reveal that the presence of problems in the school climate serves as a risk factor and highlights the importance of building stronger, more positive academic environments to support black male students’ academic achievement (p. 478).

Berkowitz et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive review of school climate research dating back to 2000. They found “substantial evidence that positive school climates contribute to academic achievement and can improve outcomes for students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds” (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Walker, 2016; Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2010).

In New Jersey, when principal Baruti Kafele found his school on the district’s school improvement list, as the new leader of the school, he and his staff’s first mission was to transform the school’s climate and culture (National Education Association, 2011). Kafele believed that schools must “address the affective before they address the academic.” Soon his school became known as one of the success stories when it came to educating marginalized males. The school was recognized on many occasions by the Schott Foundation, as well as the U.S. News & World Report magazine. It was known for having a male graduation rate that was significantly higher than the national average. Under Kafele’s leadership, the school came to be recognized three times as one of the best high schools in the United States (National Education Association, 2011; National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, 2010). School climate is a tool that can be used to reverse the negative trajectory in the education of black males. By analyzing a school’s climate, educators may be able to impact black males in a positive way.
Dulay & Karadağ (2017) conducted a meta-analysis study about the effect of school climate on student achievement. They describe school climate as the *environment or personality of the school*. They further explain it to be the *spirit or heart of the school*. “It is associated with the behaviors of the teachers, students, and other members and stockholders of the educational institution” (p. 200). The results showed that climate had a medium level positive effect on student achievement. They expressed that this finding supports the argument in the literature that climate is associated with student achievement.

Dulay & Karadağ (2017) reported:

> Based on the results obtained from this study, it is concluded that school climate, which is an important factor in creating a healthy and positive atmosphere in schools and in ensuring the effectiveness of interpersonal relations, affects the academic achievement of students positively. In other words, school climate appears as one of the basic factors that are crucial for predicting and increasing student achievement (p. 208).

Comer, Haynes, & Hamilton-Lee conducted a school climate study of 14 elementary schools in 1987. They found that changes in school climate resulted in improved attendance and reading scores of students in the experimental schools. They, therefore, concluded "for black children in particular, school climate plays a significant role in their adjustment to school and the ability to perform well" (Comer, Haynes, & Hamilton-Lee, 1987, p. 199). As the participants engage with this school climate study, hopefully the findings and action steps taken will lead to positive outcomes, such as those stated in the previously mentioned investigations.

School climate research could be beneficial in assisting educators with reaching their ultimate goals for school improvement and student achievement. But, even more so, it can help the
students by showing stakeholders (administrators, teachers, etc.) where they are lacking and how they can better support these students’ needs. “It is critical that educators be sensitive to the needs of all children, find out more about their home lives and culture, and bring those valuable and rich experiences to the classroom and to their teaching” (McLurkin, 2009; Roberts, 2010). Studies like this could lead to dialogue and actions to ensure that school communities have established environments conducive to learning for all children, especially those that have been marginalized.
CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

1. How do black boys in elementary school perceive their teachers?
2. How do black boys in elementary school perceive their school environment?

Research Design

Researchers, whether they be qualitative or quantitative, are interested in understanding a "thing" or a phenomenon as Stake (2010) describes in his text. To gain insight and understanding into the elementary schooling experiences of black boys at TES, the qualitative research tradition of a case study was used for this work. As researcher, I sought to “investigate a current phenomena in depth with its real-life context” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). This case study inquiry required the collection and analysis of multiple pieces of data from several participants to answer the research questions above. Merriam (1998), as cited in Yazan (2015), states as long as researchers are able to specify the phenomenon of interest and draw its boundaries or “fence in” what they are going to inquire, they can name it a case. The aim of this inquiry was to gain an understanding of the participants’ perceptions in regards to teacher behaviors, classroom/school environments, classroom/school rules and regulations, and values and attitudes of the classroom/school. Being that this was a school climate study, everything in the school setting mattered, from the physical space, to the people, to the policies implemented, and listening to the participants’ thoughts on the matter was of the utmost importance.

Qualitative research, such as this case study, involves in-depth inquiry. As researcher, I intended to dig deep in an effort to try to make meaning or gain an understanding of this “thing”
By utilizing a variety of methods, such as journals, a focus group meeting, and a qualitative questionnaire, the goal was to collect valuable, rich data. This data was then composed into detailed or “thick descriptions” of what was taking place within this particular setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016; Njie & Asimiran, 2014; Stake, 2010). After probing and focusing on the participants’ words, responses, and actions, through coding and analyzation, themes and patterns were identified in the data. The objective was to make connections, interpret the findings, and accurately report the experiences of the participants.

Several data gathering techniques, such as an initial qualitative questionnaire, student journals, and a focus group meeting were utilized in this study. The questionnaire included open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their personal experiences (see Appendix C). Cohen et al. (2009) as stated in Berkowitz et al. (2017) asserts:

Qualitative research designs that employ focus groups, observations, interviews, discussions, study circles, and other case-learning methods and measures are also rare in school climate research. Nonetheless, such qualitative measures are an ideal way to learn about school climate because they provide school leaders and staffs with scientifically sound information to gauge and direct efforts to improve school climate and enhance students’ academic proficiency (p. 458).

In addition to the questionnaire, journals were also utilized as a research method. That is, student journals, as well as a researcher’s journal. “If teachers want to understand boys' experiences in their classrooms, they must take the time to ask. They can use classroom activities to solicit feedback from black boys via surveys, journaling, or free writes” (Howard & Howard, 2021). Each student participant was provided with two journals. The participants journaled...
during weeks three - six of the data collection process. In their first journal, there were assigned journal prompts (see Appendix D). Students were informed that they may write, as well as draw to express themselves. The required journal prompts were pasted inside of each journal. I checked in with participants twice a week to monitor journal progress and collected them at the end of week six.

In the second journal, students were encouraged to include any other information they wanted to share; anything that might be on their minds or of interest to them. They were also allowed to complete “free writes” in their journals. Free writing is a form of prewriting. The goal is to allow the writer to get their thoughts and ideas out freely, without worrying about the conventions and mechanics of the writing process. This second journal was their personal journal.

Participants had access to their journals whenever they liked. They kept their journals with them. They were allowed to take them home, and write or draw in them as they pleased. The hope was that they would begin to feel comfortable with the process of sharing their thoughts and feelings in a journal, if they did not already. The first journal was collected as a primary source for data collection and analysis. The second journal was used as a supplemental tool to provide any additional information the participants wanted to share to assist with gaining an understanding of the phenomena.

Students were reminded and prompted to continue working in their journals often, so that they were complete by the end of the data collection period. At the end of week six, journals were collected so the entries could be thematically coded and analyzed for meaning-making. These journals were a beneficial piece in the creation of an in-depth picture of this case study.
My researcher’s journal was also used throughout the inquiry process as well. I constantly wrote down thoughts and ideas as they arose. I used this critical, ongoing piece to my process as a means of reflection and a way to check my biases. During and after sessions with the participants, I wrote down key points to include for later analysis. This note-taking method continued to be used throughout each phase of the study. This process is actually routine for me, as I journal on a daily basis in regards to my personal and professional life. This is a practice that I informally learned from my mother, throughout my life, while watching her “take to the notepad.” Glesne (2016) states “By writing memos to yourself or keeping a reflective field log, you develop your thoughts; by getting your thoughts down as they occur, no matter how preliminary or in what form, you begin the analysis process. Memo writing also frees your mind for new thoughts and perspectives” (p. 189). Writing, no matter the form (journal entries or memos) helps you to reflect and think. This has definitely been my experience with journaling.

A face-to-face focus group meeting was also conducted with the participants (see Appendix E). By facilitating a discussion with the participants, further insight into their perceptions of their teachers and school community was gathered. Glesne (2016) explains “Focus group research can have emancipatory qualities if the topic is such that the discussion gives voice to silenced experiences or augments personal reflection, growth, and knowledge development.” This method was selected in hopes that the students would feel more comfortable talking in a small group, as opposed to an individual interview. The conversation that transpired was audio-recorded and transcribed for coding and analyzation purposes.

Each participant missed no more than three portions of a Connections class period. Connections classes at TES consisted of Music, Art, Dance, Drama, Physical Education, and Computer Lab. They were 45 minutes in length. Two of the sessions was for completion of the
questionnaire, the third was for the focus group meeting. Each of those sessions took about 45 minutes. The teachers and families of the participants were notified in advance of the study and the dates their students would be participating. I collaborated with the teachers to be sure the participants were not missing critical days when they needed to be in class. I also worked with the teachers to be sure students received the information they missed while away, so they did not fall behind in their work due to participation in this research study.

Once the preliminary design of the study was complete, there were several steps that I took to move forward. First, I sought permission from the principal of Truth Elementary School to conduct research. The principal was informed of the purpose of the research and all the details involved in the study. After permission was granted from the principal, I sought permission from the school district (see Appendix F). Once the school district provided their approval to conduct research, I sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the university (see Appendix G & H).

Once permission was granted from the university, parental consent letters (in envelopes) were given to the eligible 5th grade students that met the criteria for inclusion in this study. The sealed envelopes were placed in their homework folders. By a pre-selected due date (a week and a half later), the students that returned their parental consent letters with permission to participate, were given a child assent form from me to decide if they wanted to participate in the study. Those students with parental consent and who were willing to take part in the study were then gathered to complete the initial qualitative questionnaire. The participants completed half of the questionnaire in one session and the other half in the following session. None of the participants had 504 Plans or Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s), therefore no accommodations and modifications were needed.
I picked the participants up from their classrooms right before they transitioned to their Connections classes (Music, Art, Dance, Drama, Physical Education, and Computer Lab) to complete the questionnaires. Each student entered the classroom and took their seat. I explained the purpose of the survey and read the instructions at the top. The participants were told to raise their hand if they had any questions, so I could assist them. They were also informed that they could omit any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. When complete, I thanked them for their participation in the study and gave them their student journals. At this time, I explained the guidelines for its use. Once all questions and concerns were addressed, I thanked them again for their participation, and allowed them to go back to their classes.

The focus group meeting took place in much the same way. I picked the participants up from their classrooms and we walked to the same room in which we previously met. They each sat in their same seats. This time I informed them that we were going to have a discussion about TES. I encouraged them to think about each question carefully and to answer truthfully. I told them that their honest feedback to the questions would be appreciated and beneficial to the study. They were also instructed to speak one at a time so we could clearly hear and comprehend the point they wanted to get across. This conversation was audio-recorded and transcribed. Clarity was imperative for analyzation and interpretation purposes.

**Research Setting**

This school climate study took place at Truth Elementary School (TES). The participants for the study were selected from the total population of 679 elementary school students. TES is a suburban, neighborhood school established over 50 years ago. It is a Title I school serving grades PreK–5. Title I is a program that provides federal funds through the Georgia Department of Education to local educational agencies (LEAs) and public schools with high numbers or
percentages of children in poverty to help ensure that all children meet challenging academic content and student achievement standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2022). The student population is 59% Black, 25% White, 8% Hispanic, 6% Multi-Racial, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander (GADOE: CCRPI, 2019). Ten percent of the students are Arts Infusion students. Admittance into the Arts Infusion Program (Music, Art, Dance, & Drama) is based on prior academic criteria and good character/behavior. I selected this site because this is the school in which I am employed and I am seeking the feedback from the study to build teacher capacity on how to better support young black male students. By participating in this study, the participants will help increase awareness of the experiences of black boys in the elementary school setting. By sharing their perspectives, they will provide insight for teachers, administrators, and other faculty and staff about how black male elementary students learn best.

**Sampling Procedures**

Homogeneous sampling was used for this study, which means all similar cases were selected in order to describe a subgroup in depth (Glesne, 2016, p. 51). The participants invited to participate were black males in 5th grade. I selected this age group, as 5th graders have more elementary experiences to draw from and they may have a better understanding of the questions asked of them in the questionnaire, journals, and focus group meeting. This was also an opportunity for these students to engage in self-reflection and evaluation of their elementary schooling experience; as they prepare to head on to middle school.

Participants were identified through a district-wide computer database program called Infinite Campus. When students register for school, this is the information their parents have submitted to get them enrolled. That demographic data was a factor in being selected for this study. Those coded as 5th grade, black, and male could participate. If a 5th grade male student was coded as
other or mixed with another race, but black was also specified by the parent’s initial
demographic submission in Infinite Campus, they, too, were allowed to participate in this study.
Another piece of criteria was that the participants had to have attended TES for at least two
consecutive years. The reasoning behind this was in an effort to acquire the most accurate
feedback possible that pertained to TES’ school climate only. Purposeful sampling was utilized
to “intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research
problem under examination” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). This study involved homogeneous
and purposeful sampling.

Participants

For the 2021-2022 school year, there were four 5th grade classrooms at TES. There was also
one self-contained resource class that serves a variety of grade levels. All of the black males in
each of those classes, that fit the criteria (5th grade, black, male, having attended TES for at least
two consecutive years), were invited to participate in this school climate study with permission
from a parent/guardian. Once parental consent letters were obtained, I gave those students with
permission their child assent forms so they could decide if they wanted to participate. No child
could participate in this study without permission from their parent/guardian.

Using the district-wide computer database system, Infinite Campus, 5th grade students’
demographic data was dissected to efficiently identify possible participants for this study. There
were 90 5th grade students at TES. In Infinite Campus, 36 of those students were classified as
black and male. The last piece of inclusion criteria to analyze was the enrollment factor. Of the
36 previously identified, 23 met the criteria of having attended TES for at least two consecutive
years, the other 13 did not meet the criteria. Therefore, those 23 eligible students were invited to
participate in this study. Of the 23 eligible, 5 students returned their parental consents and
signed child assent forms. Three of them have been at TES since Kindergarten and the other two enrolled in 1st grade. Those students became the participants that would inform this school climate study.

**Data Collection & Analysis**

The qualitative questionnaire, student journals, and focus group meeting served as methods for this inquiry (see Appendices C - E). The responses and feedback provided from these data gathering techniques were used for analysis and interpretation purposes. The questionnaires were administered during weeks one - two of the data collection process. Student journals were completed during weeks three – six. The focus group meeting took place during week six as well. The questionnaires, student journals, and focus group transcriptions were coded with pseudonyms to protect students’ privacy. The goal was to provide confidentiality, while also striving to make the participants feel comfortable when sharing their experiences. By establishing a safe, relaxed environment, I hoped to build trust, and encourage honest and accurate feedback in regards to their personal perspectives.

The qualitative questionnaire and focus group meeting were conducted in another setting other than the participants’ normal classroom. They were conducted in the school’s makerspace room so the participants had the time and space necessary to complete the tasks. I wanted to provide the participants with a comfortable, safe space to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. By speaking with the participants in a small group setting, I hoped to get a true assessment of their perceptions of the school’s climate. The questions were straightforward and age appropriate. Many of them came from a study entitled *If We’re Ever in Trouble They're Always There: A Qualitative Study of Teacher-Student Caring* by Aaron Jeffrey, Richard Auger, and Jennifer Pepperell. Permission for protocol usage was granted in this study (see Appendix I).
During week six, the focus group meeting was conducted. The conversation that took place was audio-recorded and transcribed. This allowed for an accurate report of what was shared by the participants.

All of these pieces came together to assist me in gaining an understanding of the participants’ schooling experiences at TES. The data helped to determine what the participants believed or felt about a variety of things such as themselves, others, and their institution. After collection, all participant responses were thematically coded and analyzed for meaning-making. Comparisons were made in order to search for themes and patterns between each of the participants’ responses. The findings were used to highlight the experiences and perceptions of black males in an elementary school community.

**Researcher’s Position**

As researcher of this inquiry, I am aware of how my varied roles play a part in my work. I am a black female born in the south. I was raised in a two-parent household with two younger brothers. I also have three older stepsisters, from my father’s first marriage. My father was in the military. We lived overseas for a few years before returning back to the south, where my father eventually retired.

I am now a wife to a black man of almost 20 years and mother to a 12-year old daughter. I am also an elementary educator of 22 years. I am a lifelong learner and a lover of knowledge. I received a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education in 2000, a Master of Arts in Instruction in 2003, and an Education Specialist degree in Early Childhood Education in 2005. Shortly after, I took some time off from school to then start a family. A few years later our daughter was born and about a year and a half later, in the fall of 2010, my youngest brother was
shot and killed. He was robbed by a young black male who I would later learn during the trial was only 19 years old at the time. This young man seemed to have a history with the law. He was on probation at the time that he murdered my brother. For ten long months, police investigators searched for and finally located the young man in a northeastern state. The trial, for my brother’s murder, did not occur until four years later, in the spring of 2014. It was then that the young man was sentenced to life in prison without parole. In 2018, he appealed to the state Supreme Court and they upheld his conviction.

My brother was only 22 years old. The unexpected loss, the grief, and the toll that losing him took on my Mama and Daddy, as they tried to remain strong for all of us… I will never forget. That was and still is a poignant part of my life.

I recognize and acknowledge that complete objectivity is not possible, but I also understand that there are steps that I can take to minimize these influences on my research inquiry for example, through the use of my researcher’s journal. Through the process of writing and reflecting, I am able to check my biases whenever they arise because there is no way for me or anyone to totally get rid of them. “No lens is free of bias: every lens has subjective and objective qualities” (Yin, 2011; Roger et al., 2018; Stake, 2010; Peshkin, 1988). People have biases. This is due to the various ways in which we were shaped, formed, or brought up. The trouble comes when we allow these personal biases to take over and interfere with how we treat, handle, or deal with others. Journaling allows me the opportunity to recognize and restrain the effects of my biases on the research.

Personal aspects of my life definitely impact my work. As I was overjoyed that my brother’s killer had been apprehended and brought to justice, I was also saddened. I was saddened because not only was my young, vibrant 22-year-old little brother taken from us way too soon, but as I
reflected back to the other side of the courtroom… this family was also losing a youthful loved one. There were truly no winners in this case.

It took me awhile to get to this point, of course, at first, I was just heart-broken and angry. I eventually, with time, began to reflect on the fact that two young black lives had been lost. This horrendous personal event and the current climate of racial injustices in the nation has definitely played a role in this research inquiry on black males in the school setting. I remain hopeful, passionate, and motivated to assist my students with whatever they may face when it comes to them getting the best education possible. I value education and equity for all. I view it as something that can never be taken away from you once you have achieved it. These beliefs inform my work and studies.

**Backyard Research**

I have worked at the research site for 9 years. I am the Early Intervention Math Teacher. After deep thought on the racial inequities in our country, especially during the pandemic, and the examination of our schoolwide academic data, I decided to conduct this study at my workplace in an effort to improve teaching and learning. My intention with this work was for the participants’ voices to be heard as it relates to their educational experiences thus far. “By listening to these students' own accounts of their experiences in school systems and the kinds of instruction they receive, how teachers perceive them, how these students think about race and racism, and the kind of care they want, educators can gain much richer insights than by merely observing black male students or interviewing their teachers and administrators” (Howard & Howard, 2021; Noguera, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998). I wanted to give the participants an opportunity to share their experiences in regards to their elementary school environment. By sharing their perspectives, it provided insight into how teachers, administrators, and other faculty
and staff could better support them in developing the skills and strategies necessary for academic success. This work has the potential to build teacher capacity, while also ensuring that the needs of young black boys are addressed. Though “backyard research” can be risky when dealing with the possibility of “dangerous, insider knowledge” (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016), I believe the benefits far outweigh the risks in this particular case. I am invested in supporting black males with being successful in school.

As an instructional support teacher at TES, I am part of the school environment. I am part of the school climate in which I am studying. “When it becomes important to study one’s own organization or workplace, we typically recommend that multiple strategies of validation be used to ensure that the account is accurate and insightful” (Creswell & Poth, 2011). As a teacher-researcher, I am an integral piece to this study. My aim, first and foremost, was to help increase awareness of the experiences and perceptions of the black boys in this study.

This research inquiry allowed the participants an opportunity to engage in self-reflection and evaluation of their elementary schooling experience. Through their lens, these boys provided first-hand knowledge about their school community. The knowledge obtained can be used to begin dialogue on how to best serve this demographic of students. This study could ultimately help elementary black male students by showing stakeholders where they are lacking and how they can better support the needs of these children. Therefore, to help ensure the quality of this study, there were a number of trustworthiness strategies that were utilized.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative studies are unique to the participants and communities they are seeking to understand. The participants’ thoughts, feelings, and perceptions cannot be duplicated
therefore, we cannot assume that a researcher replicating the study would get the same results. Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited in Glesne (2016), found that the criteria for validity associated with experimental research were inappropriate for interpretive research. Therefore, qualitative research focuses on the trustworthiness of research studies, rather than validity. According to Guba, four criteria should be considered when trying to establish a study of quality: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Shenton, 2004). *Credibility* has to do with the accuracy and integrity of the findings. It seeks to answer “How congruent are the findings with reality?” (Shenton, 2004; Glesne, 2016). *Transferability* has to do with how applicable the findings are to other settings. It invites others to apply ideas from the study to their own personal contexts. *Dependability* involves describing in detail what took place, which enables a future researcher to replicate the work. *Confirmability* helps to ensure, as much as possible, that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004; Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

There were a number of strategies employed to ensure the quality of this study, as suggested by Guba (1981). As researcher, I continually examined the existing body of related literature (*credibility*). Voluntary consent was also used as a means to secure individuals that wanted to participate and be honest in sharing their experiences (*credibility*). This research study was conducted over an extended period of time (three months) during the 21-22 school year. Therefore, prolonged engagement with the participants and site was also used as a method to ensure credibility.

To further foster credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I also provided thick descriptions of the site, participants, and the phenomena under study. By reporting the
findings in detail and providing rich data, this would allow others to make comparisons, perhaps for future research, though this work was specific to this particular school environment.

Member checking of collected data and interpretations was also utilized as a way to be sure the participants’ perspectives were accurately reflected (credibility, dependability, and confirmability). “Qualitative researchers carry a great responsibility, not only to conduct their research well, but to listen and document in a consistent and rigorous way what others share with them” (Roger et al., 2018, p. 541). I used member checking as a means to seek accuracy with the research findings and interpretations. I also monitored my subjectivity by keeping a researcher’s journal of my thoughts, ideas, and reactions (credibility and confirmability). This process of reflection helped me deal with my own personal perspectives, beliefs, and feelings. Peshkin (1988) describes a researcher’s subjectivity as a fixed, secure garment.

Alan Peshkin (1988) states:

One’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life... By monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined. I do not thereby exorcise my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it – to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome – as I progress through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data (p. 20).

In addition to the above-mentioned trustworthiness strategies, triangulation of the data was also included as a way to ensure the quality of this study. By using multiple methods of data collection or triangulation, my hope was to generate trustworthy and credible data based on the students’ perceptions of their teachers and school community (credibility, dependability,
confirmability). Collectively, each of these techniques allowed me to gain an understanding into the research questions of this study.

**Ethics**

As facilitator, I sought and gained the approvals of the school site administrator and the school district representative for research in order to conduct this study at TES. I also received Institutional Review Board approval from the ethics committee at the university.

As researcher, I am accountable to the participants involved with my study. I am responsible for sharing the feedback they give, in an unbiased way.

Glesne (2016) states:

> We are reminded that what we share is only a partial representation and generally one of our choosing. It never tells the full story or provides all perspectives on an issue. The onus is upon us to be rigorous in our work and thoughtful in what we represent, considering the feelings and perspectives of those we represent and honoring their voices. (p. 170)

This research study included vulnerable subjects (children), therefore I was continuously mindful and did all I could to protect their privacy throughout the entire research process. I strived to “respect privacy and confidentiality throughout data collection by not discussing with anyone the specifics of what I saw and heard,” and by also using pseudonyms for the setting and participants (Glesne, 2016, p. 162). These actions would be considered a form of beneficence (doing no harm and minimizing risks), one of the three ethical values established in the Belmont Report.

Pseudonyms of setting and participants were used to ensure confidentiality. All data collected was coded for anonymity and held with the strictest confidence. This inquiry does not contain
any identifiable information in regards to participants or school site to protect privacy. All data was stored on a password protected computer (off-site) and in a secure, locked file cabinet (off-site).

Summary

Research studies, such as this one, are necessary in an effort to help educators reach their goals of student success, but even more so to help students live productive lives, in and out of the classroom. When educators are supported and are able to build their capacity, this growth can be impactful for students. This research study allowed participants an opportunity to engage in self-reflection and evaluation of their elementary schooling experience, just before they moved on to middle school. Through their lens, they provided first-hand knowledge about their school community. “The examination of students’ descriptions of effective teachers and learning environments emerged from the need to examine viewpoints from a source that is rarely heard in the discussion of school reform for African American students – the students themselves” (Howard, 2002). From this study, I have gained an understanding of the ways in which we can show improvement as a school community and impact the future outcomes of the black boys that have been placed in our care.
CHAPTER 4:

FINDINGS

The purpose of this inquiry was to understand the perceptions of black boys and their elementary schooling experiences at Truth Elementary School. The first three chapters introduced the background of the study, the literature that supports the research, and the methodology behind the work. This chapter presents demographic information about the five black male participants in this study (see Table 1). It also provides the findings of this investigation into the educational experiences of the participants. This study was guided by two overarching research questions:

1. How do black boys in elementary school perceive their teachers?

2. How do black boys in elementary school perceive their school environment?

Data obtained from questionnaires, journals, and a focus group meeting with the participants were collected and analyzed to gain an understanding of their perspectives. The results were used to illuminate their voices throughout this chapter. Themes such as Building Relationships & Classroom Communities, Care, Compassion, & High Expectations, Engaging Instruction, Classroom Management, Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism, and School as Family emerged.
Table 1: Participants

This table provides brief information on each of the participants in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Enrolled at TES since</th>
<th>Description of Self</th>
<th>Interests &amp; Likes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Taheed                   | 5th    | 11  | 1st Grade             | “I would describe myself as a nice person in the classroom. Kind and careful.” | • Loves Math  
• Likes to play video games and watch movies |
| Cairo                    | 5th    | 11  | 1st Grade             | “A helper to help anyone with anything. Nice and happy.” | • Plays basketball and other sports |
| Elliott                  | 5th    | 10  | PreK                  | “I friendly and a nice person. I am kind, cool, nice, and respectful.” | • Play Switch (Nintendo Switch) and tablet  
• Likes to go to cool places like Urban Air (trampoline park)  
• Spend time with Mom |
| Christian                | 5th    | 10  | Kindergarten          | “A good student. Good, I get my work done. I’m a good kid, smart.” | • Plays with friends  
• Play games |
| Wynston                  | 5th    | 11  | Kindergarten          | “I’m am a good student with good grades. Athletic, funny, and smart.” | • Plays sports: football and basketball  
• Likes to learn about history  
• Likes to listen to music |
Site

This school climate study took place at Truth Elementary School (TES). TES is a suburban, neighborhood school established over 50 years ago. It is a Title 1 school serving grades PreK–5. The 5th grade participants were selected from the total population of 679 elementary students.

TES is led by two female administrators. The principal is white and the assistant principal is black. There are 78 total faculty and staff members. Of the total personnel population, 90% are female and 10% are male. Of the female employees, 46% are Black, 53% are White, and 1% is Hispanic. Of the male employees, 8% are Black and the other 2% is White.

In 5th grade, the grade level in which this study was conducted, there are four teachers. Three white females and one black male. The grade level is split into two teams. On one team, a black male, seasoned educator teaches English/Language Arts and Social Studies and his teammate who is a white female, veteran teacher also, teaches Math and Science. The other team is made up of two younger female teachers. One is a novice teacher that teaches English/Language Arts and Social Studies. The other has about 10 years of experience and teaches Math and Science.

The participants of this study are also exposed to the Connections teachers at TES during their school day. The Drama, Dance, Art, and PE teachers are white females, all veteran teachers. The Music teacher is a black male with over 10 years of experience. The Computer Lab teacher is a black female, seasoned educator as well.

The student population at Truth Elementary is 59% Black, 25% White, 8% Hispanic, 6% Multi-Racial, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander (GADOE: CCRPI, 2019). Ten percent of the students at TES are Arts Infusion students. Admittance into the Arts Infusion Program (Music, Art, Dance, & Drama) is based on prior academic criteria and good character/behavior. TES also
offers the following extracurricular activities, clubs, and programs for upper elementary students: 4-H Club, Art Club, Chorus, Dance Troupe, Drama Club, Flag Patrol, Math Team, Orchestra/Strings, and Track Team.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis process began as soon as the first piece of data (qualitative questionnaires) were collected. “As a common trend in qualitative tradition, Stake suggests that researchers conduct data collection and analysis processes simultaneously” (Yazan, 2015). By doing so, as the study progressed, ideas for analytic consideration were gathered, reworked, and updated as deemed necessary. Hand coding was the preferred method used in this study. Tools such as file folders, computer files, chart paper, binder clips, colored sticky notes, colored pens, markers, highlighters, paper, and scissors were utilized.

The open coding method was used to analyze the data. The data was grouped into categories. These categories were organized by individual words, key phrases, similarities, and differences. The information was read and re-read multiple times. Similar codes received the same color sticky note and were placed together on the chart paper. Margin notes and field memos were also written, pondered over, reflected on, and studied. The process of analyzing data requires full immersion into the data collected.

Merriam (1998) as stated in Yazan (2015) expressed:

Data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 145).
This case study inquiry required the collection and analysis of multiple pieces of data from several participants to arrive at the answers to the research questions. By using multiple methods or triangulation, the intent was to generate trustworthy and credible data. “The benefit of collecting various types of data (written and oral) was that it offered participants both a public and private means of communicating their thoughts and feelings” (Jeffers, 2017). Honesty was encouraged throughout the data collection process, so an authentic interpretation of the participants’ perceptions could be gathered. The focus group meeting was audio-recorded and transcribed. Recording and transcription was completed through the use of the 360 Writer app and the Smart Text Editor machine transcription service.

For accuracy purposes, I listened to the recording and read over the transcript several times to edit mistakes. Many factors may have influenced the inaccuracy in certain places of the machine-produced transcript: the quality of the audio, background noises, accents, and overlapping speech or multiple people speaking at once. Though it was a tedious process, taking the time to recheck the level of accuracy was crucial to the findings of this study.

Member checking was also utilized as a means to seek accuracy with the research findings and interpretations. It was used to help ensure the trustworthiness of this inquiry. My role in this work was not to measure or judge the participants’ feedback and responses, but to read, listen, describe, and present their actual thoughts and feelings. A large part of my accountability to the participants was to share the feedback they gave in an unbiased way.

As the data (journals and focus group transcript) began to increase, I continued determining, grouping, and analyzing codes. This was also the point when axial coding took place. “Axial coding involves taking those categories and slowly reducing the number to codes that can be combined into major themes in relation to the study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After all of the
circling, highlighting, starring, bolding, underlining, and capitalizing, the creation of those categories and codes led to the emerging of themes critical to this study.

**Emergent Themes**

The gathering and categorizing of the data collected from the questionnaires, journals, and focus group meeting all came together to provide information about the participants’ elementary schooling experience at Truth Elementary School. From the sharing of their perceptions and experiences, several themes emerged: Building Relationships & Classroom Communities, Care, Compassion, & High Expectations, Engaging Instruction, Classroom Management, Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism, and School as Family. In the following section, the findings of this study are arranged by the research questions.

Figure 4: Emergent Themes
Research Question 1: *How do black boys in elementary school perceive their teachers?*

The purpose of this question was to find out how the participants felt about their teachers at Truth Elementary School. From the data collected and analyzed, themes such as Building Relationships & Classroom Communities, Care, Compassion, & High Expectations, and Engaging Instruction emerged.

**Theme 1: Building Relationships & Classroom Communities**

In their journals, the majority of the participants stated that their teachers tell them about their life outside of school and they like it. Taheed shared “*Yes, they tell me how it was when they were growing up and what they did.*” Cairo stated that he likes these times of sharing because they tell good stories. Christian noted that his 4th grade teacher did and he liked it. Wynston wrote “*Yes, Mr. W does and it is ok because it relates to what he is teaching.*”

Two of the participants also stated that their teachers ask them questions about their life outside of school. Cairo said “*Yes and I do like it because u can tell them stuff about u.*” Taheed replied “*Yes because I get to tell them a little about me.*” When educators share their lives outside of school with students and ask them about their lives, this helps to build relationships (Howard & Lyons, 2021). This is a start to establishing a positive teacher-student relationship.

On the questionnaires, participants were also asked if they felt their teachers created a classroom environment that helped them feel comfortable and allowed them to do their best work. All five responded “*yes.*” The examples that they provided to support this question were “*He encourages us to do our best,*” “*She helps people with work,*” and “*The teachers are nice sometimes.*” Elliott stated “*When I do work she sometimes allows us to sit at the classroom library.*” Maslow suggested that for learning to occur, students must feel safe and comfortable in their environments (Maslow, 1970; Woolfolk, 1998; Jones & Jones, 2004; McLeod, 2020). From
the data gathered, the participants seem to feel their teachers have established a comfortable and safe learning environment for them.

**Theme 2: Care, Compassion, & High Expectations**

When asked if they felt the teachers at TES cared about them, three participants responded with a definite “yes” on the questionnaire. Elliott said “I don’t know” and Wynston said “Some might care.” Taheed explained that he felt like they cared because “They will just ask me if I look sad.” Cairo stated “They care about everyone in and out of the class.” Wynston shared “They talk with me one on one if something wrong with me.”

Four of the five participants revealed that there are times when they really need their teachers to care about them. Taheed said “When I’m sad or need help.” Cairo shared “When something is going on I need my teachers to care.” Christian said “When you don’t feel well, you need your teachers to care.” Wynston replied that he needs teachers to care when he needs help with some work. Elliott responded “no” to this question. Four of the five participants, shared instances when they needed their teachers to care. Howard & Howard (2021) described this care as **radical care**. “There is a need for deep-seated care for black boys in school. And not just superficial gestures or school mission statements that mention care, but a care that's replete with culturally sustaining teaching, rooted in antiracism, and tied to warm demander approaches to teaching” (Howard & Howard, 2021; Gay, 2002). The participants’ responses to this question was supported by the literature.

Participants were asked about their teachers’ expectations of them. Taheed and Cairo reported their teachers expect them to “do good and do the right thing.” Elliott said “to be on our best behavior.” Wynston shared “My teacher expects me to be smart.” Lastly, Christian wrote “to be the best I can be.” Teachers who are caring and nurturing, and yet have high expectations for
their students are known as warm demanders. “Warm demanders are educators who are able to shift back and forth between stern and nurturing teaching styles” (Howard, 2002; Ware, 2006). Geneva Gay (2002) describes it this way “Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it.” She goes on to explain that care is critical as a culturally responsive educator.

The boys were also asked about their goals for this school year and what they wanted to accomplish. Christian wrote that he wanted to “have good grades and to be a good student.” Cairo wanted to “do good and go to the next grade.” Wynston shared that he hoped to “learn new things and go to middle school.” Taheed also had the end of the school year on his mind, and shared that his goal was to be the Top iReady Reading student and Top Accelerated Reader (AR) student in 5th grade. These are two of the many awards given in May on Honors Day each school year at TES.

Howard & Lyons (2021) state:

“Teachers and administrators set expectations and viable options for their students frequently and openly, and students are notably perceptive of teachers’ expectations and investment in their academic trajectory. The vision that teachers have for students significantly influences their self-image and aspirations” (p.135).

**Theme 3: Engaging Instruction**

In their journals, when describing some of their best days at TES, the participants mentioned Field’s Day, Honor’s Day, and field trips. Christian described a field trip in 2nd grade that his class took to Legoland. This trip was a memorable event for him, even several years later. He
defined it as his favorite experience at TES. Christian’s 2nd grade teacher, who still teaches at the school, is a seasoned, black female. For many consecutive years, pre-COVID, she took her classes to Legoland Discovery Center in Atlanta, Georgia and Discovery Place in Charlotte, North Carolina. These types of trips are highly interactive and educational for students, and adults as well. As Christian’s feedback demonstrates, field trips can be valuable to student learning and engagement. These special occasions can enhance what students are learning in the classroom and provide opportunities for their views to be widened. These supplemental instructional experiences can provide support to the required curriculum in all content areas.

Continuing the topic, Cairo explained his best days as days when he is doing good in everything, even on his homework. Elliott indicated his best days are when he feels like he will make 100% on his test.

When describing their favorite teachers at TES, words like “fun” and “nice” appeared frequently. Christian described his 4th grade teacher as a good teacher. He also shared that his 5th grade Math & Science teacher is a good teacher also because “She makes things look fun.” Taheed said that his favorite teacher is nice, funny, and very athletic. Cairo explained that his favorite teacher “likes when everyone does their work.” Elliott stated that his favored teacher is “smart, intelligent, and very nice.” Wynston shared “She is fun and a good teacher.” Like most children their age, the participants like to have fun at school, and be actively engaged in the learning. Educators must find ways to make school fun and enjoyable, so black boys will want to come, participate, and learn.

When asked whether they liked classroom activities that you do on your own or with others, each of the participants selected with others. Christian stated that these types of collaborative assignments are “fun.” Cairo wrote that he enjoyed them “cause u can do it with
your classmates.” Elliott said he liked them because “most of the time they have something to do with teamwork,” and Wynston shared that he liked them because they help him to learn. Here, the research findings support the literature. Small group learning provides opportunities for black boys to help or teach, and speak more freely to their peers, which can assist with building self-confidence and fostering positive self-esteem (Essien, 2017; Emdin, 2012). It was noted that this practice created an environment where students felt more comfortable engaging, asking questions, and learning from one another. Consistently, on the questionnaire and in the focus group meeting, the participants choose collaborative group assignments.

The participants revealed that collaborative work does not take place often though in their classes at TES. Taheed expressed “Because we really...sometimes we really don’t get to do that because they do like...they say it’s like individual work.” Wynston interjected “They say...You’re not gonna be able to do that on the Georgia Milestones (state assessment). So we do it sometimes.” In the state of Georgia, 5th grade is a testing grade that counts towards promotion to the next grade level. But not only does this information count towards student promotion, it also factors into the school’s final College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score for the year. “CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students” (GADOE, 2021). Though the participants enjoy cooperative or collaborative group assignments, the pressure of the state mandated standardized test seems to play a role in the type of work the students are engaged in during class.

Not only do the participants favor collaborative work, they also mentioned that they like educational games “like when you have to roll the dice (Math games) and stuff like that.” These findings support the literature. Essien (2017) when describing the benefits of kinesthetic learning
for black boys, noted the need to incorporate games, activities, and role playing into the classroom.

Wynston also shared that he likes when they “watch videos” of whatever they may be learning about. The boys revealed that they are interested in learning more about math, typing, writing, World War II, and what it was like “back in the day.” Elliot also mentioned wanting to learn how to do flips. The participants seem to learn best through non-traditional methods of instruction.

As several school years (2019-2020, 2020-2021, and currently 2021-2022) have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it also had an impact on some of the responses of the participants. Within their journals and the focus group meeting, several participants stated their preference for face-to-face instruction. They enjoy technology (computers, laptops, tablets, etc.) as a supplementary tool, but not as the main focus of their instructional time. Wynston and Taheed, both individually on their questionnaires, noted the best way to help them learn is to teach in person. Taheed wrote “The best way to help me learn is to teach me everything face to face.”

At a later date, in the focus group meeting, participants were asked to share things they would like to see changed about their school, their classroom, or their teachers. Taheed had this to say:

“The teachers... teaching like a little more.. because like sometimes, they like just tell us to get on the computers, but sometimes you don’t really understand the computer. You understand the teacher better than the computer.”

As of December 2021, TES became a 1:1 technology school. This means that each student with parental permission was provided with a Chromebook through checkout from the schools’ media center. This was a district initiative, that began in 2017, to make education more equitable
for all students. Education sales tax funds and the U.S. Department of Education’s CARES Act (COVID relief funds) were used to provide a device for every student. The thought was that these devices could assist with personalizing learning, engagement, increasing creativity, and providing access to knowledge outside of the classroom.

The participants shared that they like instructional software like “Kahoot and Blooket.” These online tools were used to engage learners, support instruction, and foster collaboration and communication. These resources also offered a bit of competition in class, which the participants enjoyed, whether teachers selected to setup individually or in team mode. Essien (2017) affirmed how fostering healthy competition can be an effective strategy for engaging black boys. It is described as increasing black males’ intrinsic interest in classroom learning.

During the focus group meeting, when sharing the things that frustrate them about TES, Cairo mentioned the Computer Lab. He went on to explain “Because it’s like, you gotta do iReady every time.” Elliott interjected “Wait, wait, we do do typing.com.” Wynston agreed with Cairo “Computer lab too because you just do the same stuff every single day you go there. It’s just... you're not really learning anything face to face you’re just learning something on the computer.”

The majority of the participants shared that they do not like the iReady Reading and Math program. They stated that when they go to the Computer Lab each week for Connections, they are only allowed to get on iReady lessons. They said they do Reading one week, Math the next week, and continue alternating in that fashion. They indicated that it is boring and they tend to get off task quickly.

Though the participants appreciated the various aspects of having technology at their fingertips, they also wanted their teachers to be mindful that there is nothing like the face-to-face interaction that takes place in a classroom, which Taheed stated ever-so eloquently above.
Wynston continuing the conversation also added that he tends to lose focus:

“When the teachers... ummm... doesn't do a lot of face to face work... like really talk....

Mr. W does a lot of that, Ms. A does a lot of that... but the subs don't.”

From their feedback, the majority of the participants desire the teacher-student interaction that takes place with teaching and learning. They want to be engaged in the learning. Several of them seem to get that with their regular classroom teachers, but not with the substitutes that have often been covering their classes as of late.

Data collection for this study began during the winter, as the Omicron variant began to surge around the country. During this phase of the study, the participants endured a lot of substitutes in the building, as TES and other schools were striving to remain open through the pandemic. Therefore, due to staff shortages at TES, in the district, and beyond numerous substitutes provided coverage for the certified staff during this time period.

**Research Question 2: How do black boys in elementary school perceive their school environment?**

The purpose of this research question was to find out how the participants felt about Truth Elementary School’s environment. From the data collected and analyzed, themes such as Classroom Management, Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism, and School as Family emerged.

**Theme 1: Classroom Management**

During the focus group meeting, the participants were asked if they were able to be the best student they can be in their classrooms. Cairo responded “I try.” As I probed for more information, he shared the distractions that take place in his classes. When discussing some of
the disruptions that stop these boys from being the best they can be in the classroom, they had a lot to share. Christian stated “Things that make me distracted are when my classmates are talking and I can’t focus.” Taheed reported “Ummm... when kids like they... they get in front of the classroom when the teacher’s out of the room or not looking then they go in the middle of the classroom and start dancing.” Christian agreed, saying this about his classmates, “They are loud and sometimes they are mean.”

Peers making jokes, texting on their phones, dancing, “talking loud,” fighting, “getting up out there seat,” playing in class or “clowning in class” as Taheed called it, and boredom once having understood the content being taught were all cited as reasons for not being able to be their best in class. Wynston stated he gets off track in class “when we’ve done the same thing for about like a week and then I understand the subject, especially in Ms. A’s class.” From the responses provided by the participants, it seems that a couple of their teachers could benefit from additional support in the areas of classroom management and providing enrichment opportunities for learners.

A couple of the boys shared an example of how their peers try to skip or get out of class when they do not want to go. Elliott shared “Like, so it was like another day when they be ripping off their mask.” He changed his tone of voice to mock his peers “Oh no my mask broken, can I go to the office Mrs. R?” Then, he switched back to his original voice “Yeah, yeah... it's just like you getting hurt, but you’re not.” Taheed, who is in a different class, added “Cause sometimes like... some kids will just...they like break their mask. They'll go to the front and then about 5 minutes later they’ll break it again and then they’ll come back to the front.” Mask mandates have been in place now for a little over two years in TES’ school district and beyond. Masking, social distancing, and appropriate handwashing are all measures the school system has been
implementing to try to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community. During this
discussion, Taheed was emphasizing how some students break their protective masks on purpose
to get out of class and go to the front office where there is an extra supply of disposable masks,
from the district, given out by the office staff. Taheed stated he knew “Cause the ones in the
front they be like... well we just gave you a mask five minutes ago.” He continued with “Then by
the end of the day, they have like three masks.” To which Elliott replied, “People in my class be
having twelve.” The literature suggests “When students dislike the class/school and want to be
somewhere else, it may not matter where the else is, as long as it is not the class/school”
(Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). The findings, here, reveal the presence of a problem
with classroom management and highlights the need for a more effectively managed learning
environment for students to learn and grow. Effective teachers must be able to engage their
learners and manage their classroom environments. Though young, the participants seem to be
very aware of all that transpires in these spaces.

**Theme 2: Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism**

During the focus group meeting, when asked whether they felt teachers cared about some
students more than others, the participants responded in various ways. The majority said “yes”
and one participant said “sometimes.” Follow-up questions were asked to probe further. For
example, “What kind of students do teachers seem to care more about? Girls?” The boys
unanimously responded that they did not feel their teachers liked girls more than boys. Wynston
stated that they were treated equal. The participants also unanimously agreed that their teachers
do not show favor regarding richer or poorer students.

The boys did, however, share that they felt their teachers paid more attention to the smarter
kids. Wynston remarked “Yeah, yeah because I think Ms. A ...” Elliott interrupted “Don’t say
names.” Wynston continued “One of the teachers cares about two students more than they do... or... three more than they do about other students.” At that time several of the boys began to chime in and agree. They mentioned that they knew exactly who Wynston was talking about. Wynston concluded “I guess they’re smarter or something. They pay more attention to them.”

This discussion of perceived preference went on to include popular students vs. kids who are not as popular. The boys all commented “no” to this question. Taheed said “Nah, they don’t even know who the popular kids are.” When asked whether they felt their teachers cared more about white students than students of color, there were mixed responses. Elliot felt that this was a racist question and promptly stated that. As facilitator, I immediately informed the participants that this question was about race, but that it was not a racist question. I expressed to them that this question would provide information about their experiences with race in school. After my explanation, Wynston and Taheed responded instantly with their encounters.

Wynston shared:

“I didn't finish her work... when I didn’t finish her worksheet. But the other person that was white didn't finish the worksheet, but she yelled at me for not finishing the worksheet.”

Immediately after Wynston, Taheed said that he had a similar experience. He stated:

“The same thing... Like. We all had...Like I had one more question. The other person had like four more questions and she got mad at me because I didn’t finish that one question, but the other person had four questions to go.”

Instantly, Elliott wanted to know what was going to happen to those “racist teachers and the kids that are white.” Christian and Cairo remained silent, watching, and listening.
Two of the five participants verbalized their experiences with race at TES. The other three may have had experiences with race as well, but did not share them. They may have felt uncomfortable or afraid. It is not uncommon for black boys to experience racism in their schools (Howard & Howard, 2021; Kirkland, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Noguera, 2003). In response to Elliott’s question about what was going to happen to the “racist teachers and the kids that are white,” the participants were reminded that these questions were being asked to help others gain an understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to school.

When asked what they would tell teachers about how to be more caring towards black boys, four of the respondents shared their thoughts. Wynston said “Treat everybody equally and not give anybody less attention or more attention.” Taheed chimed in “Like favoritism.” Cairo replied “Teach me more stuff how to do.” Elliott remarked “Be respectful.” In Race Against Time: Educating Black Boys, it states “Treating every student with the dignity, respect, guidance, discipline, and caring passion you would give your own child works well with black males.” That statement coincides with Elliott’s response for teachers.

**Theme 3: School as Family**

When asked how they felt about school, each of the five participants had positive responses. Wynston, Christian, and Taheed shared that they felt good about school. Cairo went on to share “It’s cool to be back in school to see my friends,” referring to the varied instructional modes during the COVID-19 pandemic (virtual and face to face). Elliott said that he felt comfortable at school. Taheed wrote “I feel like my school is good because it’s a good environment.”

During these elementary years, several of the participants have made connections and developed relationships with the custodial staff at Truth Elementary School. As stated previously, one of the participants enrolled at TES in PreK, two in Kindergarten, and two in 1st
grade. In various places throughout the data set, two of the four custodians are mentioned. One of those instances was during the focus group meeting when discussing changes they would like to see take place at TES. Wynston emphasized “Better...ummm, restrooms. No, not better restrooms because our restroom it just gets dirty. Somebody’s been messing it up. There's sunflower seeds in the bathroom right now.” Wynston further articulated that the bathrooms are fine, but it is the students that are messing them up.

The 5th grade wing at TES is the newest addition to the school building. This part of the building was completed in 2019. It is a little over three years old. Wynston continued “Yeah, like there's sunflower seeds and there was like some red stuff in the...” Elliott interrupted “It’s a Taki... Taki Sunflower Seeds.” Taheed commented “In our bathroom they had clogged the toilet with tissue and the urinals and overflowed the bathroom and had hot Cheetos all over the floor.” Wynston remarked “I feel like they... they try to make the custodians’ job more harder.” Taheed replied “Yeah, because they have to clean up the lunchroom and then hallways and then they got the bathrooms.” The majority of the boys showed deep concern for the extra work that was being placed on the custodians by their peers.

The head custodian at TES is a black female. There are two other black females and one black male that work alongside her. The boys in this study seem to have a rapport with the head custodian and the black male employee. The head custodian seems to provide an “auntie” type role for the boys. The black male custodian seems to fulfill a “grandfather” role. For example, he frequently supports and attends some of the students’ extracurricular events outside of school hours. Both employees ceaselessly look out for the students and staff at TES, and several of the boys have established a genuine connection to these staff members.
In their journals, the participants responded to a prompt about whether they feel supported and cared for at TES. All of the boys responded positively. Taheed said “I feel cared for by others.” Christian replied “Yes, my teacher makes things fun.” Cairo said “Yes, if like something’s going on they care.” Wynston wrote “Yes because they help me learn.” Elliott described it this way “there are kind souls everywhere.”

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (2022) states:

“Very young children will thrive and become more engaged learners when provided a safe, stimulating environment, where adults provide and foster positive relationships between and among adults and children. All students – and particularly young children – learn best when their education is provided in an environment that is safe both physically and emotionally” (p. 1).

When asked if they felt like they belonged at TES, the boys all unanimously stated “yes.” They felt that TES has “more opportunities for them to learn new stuff.” They shared that if they ever needed help they could ask teachers, other students, janitors, the school nurse, siblings, and their parents.

When asked whether they felt safe at school, again the participants responded positively. Cairo mentioned that if anything were going on, he could always “tell a teacher.” Wynston and Christian wrote about the “security” measures that have been put in place, such as “fire drills, tornado drills, and lockdown drills.” Black boys tend to learn best in environments in which they feel safe, supported, challenged, and accepted.

All of the participants commented that they feel the rules at TES are equal and fair for everyone. They also felt that good behavior was noticed and recognized at their school. “When
you do something good,” “When you are nice to people,” and “When you are not talking while the teacher is talking” were a few of the examples the respondents shared.

When asked if they felt TES was preparing them to be successful in middle school, all participants responded “yes.” Christian remarked “Yes, because we do learning all the time.” Wynston said “Yes because it teaches me a lot of new things.” Cairo replied “Yes because it’s getting us ready for middle school.” Taheed indicated “Yes because they want us to be the best we can be and they challenge us to be the best we can.”

When asked who or what motivates them to do well in school, each of the participants named family and friends. Family members such as Mom, Dad, brothers, aunts, grandmas, and grandpas were mentioned. When asked where they could go for help if needed, Wynston, Cairo, and Christian all stated “to a teacher.” Christian also referenced his Mom and his big brother. Taheed stated that he goes to the office or the bathroom. Elliott commented that he goes to “the doctor of the school” (school nurse).

On the questionnaire, participants were asked if there was an adult in the school building that they could talk to when they were happy and also when they were sad. Cairo named his homeroom teacher, who also teaches him Math & Science. He stated “because if somebody do something to me I get mad.” His homeroom teacher has been a support for him when issues arise at school. Christian, who is in the same homeroom as Cairo, also selected this teacher. He said that he can talk to her because she is “a good teacher.” Elliott, who is in a different homeroom, also named this same teacher. She teaches him Math & Science also, just during another class period. Elliott wrote “She likes when I tell her all of the stuff like if I am going out of town.” From the participants’ feedback, there seems to be at least one adult in the building that they have established a relationship with and can go to if needed.
Taheed, who is on the other 5th grade team with Wynston, expressed that his Math & Science teacher is one of the people that he can talk to when feeling sad. He added that “She is careful (full of care) and she’s nice.” When he’s happy, Taheed stated that he can talk to this same teacher and also the head custodian of TES. “They make me happy and they’re funny” he shared. On this question, Wynston indicated “No there is not a adult in the school building that I can talk to when I’m sad.” But, he did list the P.E. Coach as someone that he could talk to when he was happy. “The reason I chose her is because she teaches me new sports, and I joined her track team last year” he explained.

The participants were also asked if they felt their principals cared about them. All respondents reported “yes” on their questionnaires. Wynston indicated they care because they are nice to him. Christian said he knows because “they do their best.” Cairo emphasized “the principals care about all students.” Taheed shared that they tell him to do his best. Elliott remarked “they give you other chances and are very very nice.” Here, Elliott’s response fits into the “Forgiving” category of the Twelve Characteristics of an Effective Teacher by Robert J. Walker. Characteristic # 11 states that the most effective educators “Habitually start each day with a clean slate, forgive students for inappropriate behavior, and understand that a forgiving attitude is essential to reaching difficult students” (Walker, 2008). In his feedback, Elliott seemed appreciative of the extra chances provided by his administrators.

In their journals, one of the prompts asked the participants to imagine themselves as principals of TES. They were to share the things they felt were working well at the school. Elliott wrote “All the teachers and staff and custodians.” Taheed shared that the Connections classes were going good. Cairo stated “Teaching cause we learn new stuff everyday.” Christian noted
“This school is good.” Wynston also shared “The academic success because this school is smart.”

On their questionnaires, each of the five participants reported that they felt successful in school. Christian wrote “I have A’s and B’s.” Taheed also stated that he feels successful because he gets “good grades.” Cairo indicated “Yes because I have made to the fifth grade and u can go to college.” Elliott replied “Yes, why is because I try my best when it come to school work.” Wynston responded “Yes I do. I feel like I’m successful because I’m in Beta Club, I won the Chance tournament and the free throw contest, I have good grades and I’m on flag team and I might make the track team.” The findings suggest that the participants seem to associate success with getting good grades in school.

All of the participants in this study have hopes and dreams of moving on to middle school in a few months, but they also have other aspirations beyond this approaching goal. In their journals, the participants wrote about their goals after high school and what they want to be when they grow up. Three of the five participants want a career in sports. Cairo wants to be a “basketball or baseball player.” Wynston wants to “play in the NBA.” Taheed wrote that he wants to “become a football player for the Dallas Cowboys.” Christian indicated that he plans to “get a job and go to college.” Elliott stated that he wants to become the best person he can be.

All of the boys felt that school could help them accomplish their goals for the future. School can “teach me strategies” wrote Elliott. Wynston said school “can give me a backup plan.” When asked whether they felt TES was doing a good job of preparing them for their future, all participants responded “yes.” Elliott stated that school “does a lot of good.” Christian said it helps him “to know a lot.” Taheed added that he thought “they could do a little more learning
than they do.” Wynston also replied “yes” to this question, and said “it teaches me life lessons.”

All of the participants felt that school was a tool that was going to be beneficial to their lives.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings of the data collected from the five participants. Once all the data (questionnaires, journals, and focus group meeting transcript) were examined, categorized, and coded, the perspectives of the participants were interpreted. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, common themes and patterns began to emerge such as Building Relationships & Classroom Communities, Care, Compassion, & High Expectations, Engaging Instruction, Classroom Management, Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism, and School as Family.

Building Relationships & Classroom Communities focused on the ways in which teachers build relationships with their students and establish communities of learning. Care, Compassion, & High Expectations described the caring qualities of the teachers, as well as their firmness. Engaging Instruction focused on the participants’ preferences for teaching and learning. Collaborative work, field trips, games, videos, and technology were listed as some of their favorite methods of learning. The participants also selected face-to-face instruction as the most effective mode of instruction for them. Classroom Management focused on the participants’ learning environment. The participants’ responses were less than favorable in this area. They shared several instances where they felt their learning was disrupted by the behavior of their peers in their classes. Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism dealt with the thoughts and feelings of the participants regarding teachers and their actions in the learning environment. Throughout the study, most feedback in reference to the teachers, was positive, despite a mention of instances of favoritism for smart students and issues of race as perceived by the participants.
Lastly, School as Family provided information about the atmosphere or “spirit, heart, or character” of TES (Dulay & Karadağ, 2017). Again, most responses were favorable, but there were incidences where the boys had issues and concerns with the behavior of their peers in the boys’ bathroom on the 5th grade hall. By taking the time to share their thoughts and feelings, the five participants of this study have provided a glimpse into their elementary schooling experiences at Truth Elementary School.
CHAPTER 5:
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research and statistics on the education of black males consistently show a growing achievement gap (UNCF, 2018; Schott Foundation, 2015), overrepresentation in special education classes (Schott Foundation, 2015; Kirkland, 2021, NEA, 2011), inequitably harsh discipline measures: suspensions, expulsions, and incarcerations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; McIntosh et al., 2018; Schott Foundation, 2015; Kirkland, 2021; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997), and startling high school graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Kafele, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011). The majority of the research available connected to the adolescent or teen years (Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018; Law, Finney, & Swann, 2014; Rudd, 2014; Kafele, 2012; Darenbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Monroe, 2006; Gillborn, 1997). Though there was a significant amount of research on the middle and high school years, there was not as much concerning the elementary, developmental years. There was also a lack of studies that sought the perspectives of black boys. It was rare to find a study that included their vantage points on the issues concerning them, and definitely not in the elementary setting (Essien, 2017). This research study focused on the education of black boys in the elementary school setting.

Research concerning black boys in elementary school is crucial, as it could “shine a light” on the educational experiences of these students. Therefore, this research inquiry was necessary to contribute to what is lacking in the literature regarding the schooling of elementary black boys. The intention of this work was to allow the participants’ voices to be heard as it related to their educational experiences. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions of 5th grade black boys regarding their teachers and school community.
Discussion of the Findings

The data collected from the questionnaires, journals, and focus group meeting all came together to provide knowledge about the participants’ schooling experiences at Truth Elementary School. From the sharing of their perspectives and experiences, the following themes emerged: Building Relationships & Classroom Communities, Care, Compassion, & High Expectations, Engaging Instruction, Classroom Management, Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism, and School as Family.

**Research Question 1:** How do black boys in elementary school perceive their teachers?

**Building Relationships & Classroom Communities**

When teachers establish an inviting, positive, classroom environment, it welcomes students into the learning process. The majority of the boys in this study felt that their teachers created a comfortable, productive environment for learning. For black boys to succeed, educators must build a supportive environment of community within their classrooms (Howard & Lyons, 2021; Jackson et al., 2021). They must create an atmosphere where students want to come to class to learn and grow. It is imperative that educators establish safe, comfortable, engaging spaces for learners, as the classroom is where the majority of their school day will be spent.

Developing caring, trusting relationships with black boys is also important. Research shows that teacher-student relationships in Kindergarten are related to later academic and behavioral outcomes through eighth grade (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2010; Rashid, 2009). Relationships matter. Bencivenga & Elias (2003) agreed stating “Caring relationships form the foundation of lasting learning.” The majority of the participants in this study perceived that their teachers believed in them and cared about them. “There is research that suggests that the performance of African Americans, more so than other students, is influenced to a large
degree by the social support and encouragement they receive from teachers” (Noguera, 2003).

When students have a good relationship with their teacher, this helps to strengthen their desire to learn.

McNally & Slutsky (2018) stated:

“Establishing quality relationships in early childhood is essential because the support from positive relationships sets children up for success by providing children with a secure base to explore and engage in classroom activities that support academic and social development. High-quality teacher–child relationships are also associated with academic achievement, social success, school readiness, school adjustment, and social competence” (p. 512).

**Care, Compassion, and High Expectations**

The data suggests that when genuine interest and concern is shown for black boys, they feel it and they know it. The boys shared various instances in which they felt cared for. Taheed explained that he felt like his teachers cared because “They will just ask me if I look sad.” Wynston shared “They talk with me one on one if something wrong with me.” Here, Wynston’s response supports previous research. It fits into the “Respect Students” category of the *Twelve Characteristics of an Effective Teacher* by Robert J. Walker. Characteristic # 10 states that the most effective educators “Speak to students in private concerning grades and conduct, show sensitivity to feelings, and consistently avoid situations that unnecessarily embarrass students” (Walker, 2008). In his feedback, Wynston seemed grateful for the respect shown to him by his teachers.

Four of the five participants revealed that there are times when they really need their teachers to care about them. Taheed said “*when I’m sad or need help.*” Cairo shared “*When something is*
going on I need my teachers to care.” Christian said “When you don’t feel well, you need your teachers to care.” Wynston replied that he needs teachers to care when he needs help with some work. The boys were very open and honest about what they needed from their teachers.

When describing some of the characteristics of their teachers, the boys mentioned that their teachers were nice sometimes, but wanted them to “be smart, do good, do their best, and be on their best behavior.” Educators must challenge black boys academically and hold high regard and expectations of them.

Jeffers (2017) stated:

“Teachers interact with students over a long period of time, and the opinions they hold, as well as what they expect from students, are critical for effective classroom instruction and academic achievement. Teachers exerting positive influences on students encourage and challenge them to think critically, excel academically, and develop more of an interest and appreciation for learning” (p. 227).

**Engaging Instruction**

The findings of this study indicated that some of the boys perceived that their teachers planned engaging lessons for them. They indicated some of their learning preferences were collaborative work, face-to-face instruction, games, videos, field trips, and technology. These findings were consistent with existing research.

Ladson-Billings (2021) states:

“Teachers will need to build their pedagogical repertoires to ensure they are reaching all students. Teachers must move beyond lectures and telling as teaching. Teachers must become skilled in using authentic discussion and debate strategies, cooperative grouping,
and small group activities. A re-set pedagogy can pull on youth culture in innovative ways” (p. 74).

Teachers must find exciting, engaging ways to connect black boys to the content. Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie (1997) stated “There is the sense that students want to learn, and they favor interesting and challenging rather boring and repetitive work.” Wynston shared that he tends to lose focus “When the teachers... ummm...doesn't do a lot of face to face work... like really talk.... Mr. W does a lot of that, Ms. A does a lot of that... but the subs don't.” During the focus group meeting, the boys also mentioned another instance when they get bored and lose interest, and that was during their weekly Computer Lab (Connections) class. Cairo explained “Because it’s like, you gotta do iReady every time.” Wynston agreed “Computer lab too because you just do the same stuff every single day you go there. It’s just... you're not really learning anything face to face you’re just learning something on the computer.” Wynston also mentioned this again on his questionnaire, he wrote “My least favorite is computer lab because all you do when you get there is sit and watch iReady.” What educators consider interesting and fun, may not be the same for their students. In order to ensure engagement, teachers must get to know the students they serve.

Collaborative learning, as the boys mentioned, is not only beneficial as a strategy to allow students to work together and learn from each other, it can also be used as a means to assist teachers with learning more about their students. By having students work in small groups, teachers can get a glimpse of their individual strengths, weaknesses, and interests. One elementary educator described small group instruction by saying “This allows me to really get to know my students and figure out what motivates them! It also keeps their attention and makes them feel safe” (Essien, 2017; Tatum, 2021). The research states that small groups foster
learning in black boys because they are able to speak freely, engage, ask questions, and learn from others (Essien, 2017; Wright & Counsell, 2018; Wright & Ford, 2016). It creates a more comfortable, relaxed environment for learning to occur.

Culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies also require that teachers invest time and energy into getting to know their students and their families. Once teachers have begun this getting-to-know-you process, they can then begin to use this knowledge to find ways to integrate it into the curriculum. They should take heed of the various cultures represented in their classes, and bring in literature and media about or by individuals/characters of those same cultures. Teachers may also bring in guest speakers, allow students to propose ideas for projects based on the content being taught, and make reference to things the students can relate to (youth culture), for example TikTok (Howard & Lyons, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2009). When educators are able to connect the instructional content with the daily lives of their students, for instance by incorporating their music, movies, and literature, it does not take anything away from the curriculum, it just adds to it – spices it up a bit! By integrating the curriculum into their students’ real world, it allows educators to tap into their interests and culture. It allows the content to become real and relevant for them. This is an impactful way for educators to use the diverse cultures represented in their classes and merge them into the curriculum they are required to teach.

Practices like this allow students to apply the skills they have learned in class to issues they care about. Activities like these draw black boys in and motivates them to participate. When discussing ethnically diverse learners, Geneva Gay (2002) stated “Teachers need to know how to use cultural scaffolding in teaching these students—that is, using their own cultures and
experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement.” Imagine the possibilities and the engagement that can take place when black boys are involved in this way!

In order for teachers to reach students, they must understand how culture impacts learning. They have to plan for instruction that takes this into account. When culturally responsive educators take part in these types of practices it allows black boys to find more success with the content because they are able to make personal connections with the material. They can use their prior knowledge to build and develop new understandings.

When culturally responsive practices are incorporated, it makes lessons much more engaging for students. Not only that, but when marginalized students are included in this way, they begin to feel welcome, seen, valued, and like they are capable of academic success, which should be the goal of all educators. “The role of the teacher is not to elevate one culture or denigrate the other but rather to help students understand that different cultural stances help us to see the world differently” (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The world is diverse, and schools have to start reflecting this reality. This is what culturally responsive educators do to ensure their diverse learners are engaged with the required curriculum.

**Research Question 2:** How do black boys in elementary school perceive their school environment?

**Classroom Management**

Though the participants described their classroom environments in various ways: safe, fun, and comfortable, they also mentioned challenges such as the behaviors of peers. The boys shared several negative behaviors of their peers that they perceived as distracting them from learning in class. Behaviors such as peers making jokes, texting on their phones, dancing, “talking loud,” fighting, “getting up out there seat,” and “clowning in class” were described by the participants.
Educators must create and foster a positive, safe, supportive, well-managed learning environment for their students. When that is threatened, they must implement effective classroom management strategies including rewards and consequences.

When disciplining black boys, research states “Avoid punishment that denies a child the teaching methods he most needs to be successful, for instance, isolation rather than cooperative learning and extra sitting rather than large-motor, physical activity” (NEA, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Monroe, 2005). The reasoning behind this is to have the student stay in class as much as possible to hear the instruction being given, whether they are placed in a “cool down corner,” “time out” area, or some other spot within the classroom. The aim is to keep students in the classroom and learning instead of removed from instruction. When black boys are in the principals’ office, suspended, or expelled, they are missing out on critical instruction, which contributes to achievement gap data (McIntosh et al., 2018; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Extreme discipline measures (suspensions and expulsions) should only be used in warranted situations. School leaders need to monitor their office discipline referrals and perhaps make distinctions between major vs. minor discipline infractions, so there is consistency schoolwide (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This could help with trivial occurrences being written up as major offenses.

Just as curriculum and instruction was originally established to serve the dominant culture, the same is true for disciplinary measures in schools. Monroe (2005) suggested that what these measures are lacking is a cultural context. Ware (2006) and Howard (2002) agree with Monroe’s view. In their works, they both speak of the warmth and firmness required when disciplining black boys. This is what is known as being a warm demander. “Eradicating the discipline gap requires theorists, researchers, and practitioners to familiarize themselves with culturally specific behavioral norms, and incorporate culturally familiar behavior management strategies into their
practice” (Monroe, 2005, p. 48). She recommended that educators incorporate and place value in culturally responsive disciplinary strategies. Skiba & Sprague (2008) states “Evidence suggests that discipline disparities are caused at least in part by cultural mismatch or insufficient training in culturally responsive classroom management.” Many educators could benefit from being supported in this area.

The Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports has developed a field guide entitled PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide: Resources for Trainers and Coaches that outlines how to integrate culturally responsive practices into behavioral interventions and supports. The goal of the guide is to make school systems more responsive to the cultures and communities they serve (Leverson et al, 2021; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). This resource could assist schools with considering the role culture plays in discipline.

During the focus group meeting, when discussing some of the things that stop the participants from being the best student they can be, Wynston shared that he tends to get off track in class “when we’ve done the same thing for about like a week and then I understand the subject, especially in Ms. A’s class.” Wynston’s response to this question tied in directly with a scenario that Gloria Ladson-Billings (2011) discussed in her article entitled Boyz to Men? Teaching to Restore Black Boys’ Childhood. In the article, she wrote about a little boy in Kindergarten, one of the brightest students in the class, and how his boredom with school began to show up in his behavior. When describing the needs of that student, she stated “He needed the teacher to acknowledge his superior intellect, encourage him as a student, and to design appropriate instructional activities so that he would have less time to get bored and begin pestering other students” (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Boredom once having understood the content being taught was also cited in the findings of this study as a reason for not being able to be their best in class.
To effectively teach black boys, educators must be able to maintain their interest and engage them in the instruction. At times, student behavior can be linked to a lack of engagement. “Student behavior is intimately connected to the quality of instruction in the classroom. When students are intellectually immersed in learning tasks they are less likely to engage in behaviors that detract from the instruction at hand” (Monroe, 2005; McIntosh et al., 2018). Culturally responsive pedagogy and enrichment/extension activities could assist educators with keeping black boys engaged in the learning.

**Consciousness of Racism and Favoritism**

During the focus group meeting, the participants were asked “*Do you think teachers care more about some students than others?*” Follow-up questions such as “*Do you think teachers care more about girls or boys?*” and “*Do you think teachers care more about richer kids or poorer kids?*” were asked for probing purposes. To each of these questions, the participants responded “No” unanimously.

It was during this same meeting that the boys’ experiences with favoritism and race at TES were revealed. Of all the data collection methods, this particular portion of the focus group meeting was the most tense. When asked “*Do you think teachers care more about smart kids or those that are not as smart?*” the boys perceived that their teachers cared more about the smarter kids. Without naming the names of his peers, one participant shared his perception, and the other boys all chimed in and agreed that they knew who he was talking about. They stated that they came to this conclusion because the teachers paid more attention to these kids.

The question “*What kind of students do teachers seem to care more about? White students or students of color?*” caused quite a stir in the room as well. As shared in Chapter 4, Elliott adamantly stated that the question was a racist question. As facilitator, I immediately informed
the participants that the question was about race, but that it was not a racist question. I expressed
to them that this question would provide information about their experiences with race in school.
Directly after my explanation, two of the participants shared their encounters. The other two
participants remained silent, watching, and listening, as if not wanting to get in trouble.

In the *Race Against Time: Educating Black Boys*, The National Education Association (2011)
shared a discussion between four black friends in college, and their experiences growing up as
black students. In the course of the conversation, it became quite evident that even during their
elementary years, these students’ awareness of the racial inequities that were taking place in their
classes at the time, did not go unnoticed, even by the youngest members in that educational
institution. Therefore, being consistent with the findings of this study, though the children did
not have the terminology for what was taking place (systemic racism, implicit racism, explicit
racism, microaggressions, and equity to name a few), it was evident they understood exactly
what was occurring in their classrooms.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Marc Elrich (1994) explained that the legal barriers that once
existed for educating children of color, for ex. Brown vs. Board of Education, did not and could
not undo the attitudes and actions of a society steeped in racism. Though the words and actions
of the adults in the building may not be expressed explicitly, they may be implied implicitly and
felt by young, impressionable students, as these children are not naïve or unaware of the
circumstances surrounding them. The participants of this study were also aware and conscious of
issues of race at TES. Kirkland (2021) describes this awareness as “the development of critical
consciousness or wokeness,” which was consistent with the data. Noguera (2003) also discussed
this awareness in his article *The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of
Environmental and Cultural Factors on the Academic Performance of African American Males.*
Critical Race Theory was used as a lens to examine race and its’ impact on the educational experiences of these five black boys. “CRT is a commitment to social justice and takes the position that, not only is racism woven into the fabric of American society, but many of its inhabitants have grown accustomed to what that fabric feels like and what it appears to represent” (Jeffers, 2017). One of the main beliefs of CRT is that racism, both conscious and unconscious, is normal or ordinary in the US; that racism is a part of American life (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Capper, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002). The teachers of both of the boys that shared their race encounters could benefit from examining their biases, as discussed in Chapter 2. This process would allow the teachers to make themselves aware of how their personal attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, whether conscious or unconscious, may be harmful to black boys and any other diverse learners they may serve.

The narrative/storytelling or “truth-telling” component of CRT was also utilized as a tool in this study to address race. Delgado (1989), as cited in Parker & Lynn (2002), states “only through listening can the conviction of seeing the world one way be challenged, and one can acquire the ability to see the world through others’ eyes.” This theoretical framework allowed me to hear a contrasting story from the norm; “a counter-story or counter-narrative.” Solorzano and Yosso (2009), as cited in Jeffers, (2017), define counter-storytelling as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told. The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging majoritarian stories of racial privilege.” This research inquiry into the educational experiences of black boys allowed me the opportunity to do exactly that – listen to their voices.

Critical Race Theory is currently under intense debate around the country. Some adults believe that it is a curriculum they do not want taught in schools. They maintain that it teaches
hate of the dominant culture. But, those who actually understand the concept know that CRT is an approach to examine how race impacts schools and society. It is a tool that can be used to expose and address problems and inequities (Kirkland, 2021; Capper, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Roberts, 2010; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Policymakers must understand that whether CRT is brought into teaching and learning or not, the conversations and issues about race in schools are still taking place, even amongst the youngest observers. These children are aware and conscious of all that is transpiring in their learning environments.

Noguera (2003) states:

“Even when teachers do not speak explicitly about race and racial issues with children, children become aware of physical differences related to race quite early. However, children do not become aware of the significance attached to these physical differences until they start to understand the ideological dimensions of race and become cognizant of differential treatment that appears to be based on race…School practices that isolate and separate children on the basis of race and gender send children important messages about the significance of race and racial differences” (p. 443).

Joyce King (1991) would describe what occurred during the “race” portion of the focus group meeting as dysconscious racism. “Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things (dominant White norms and privilege) as givens” (King, 1991, p. 135). She expressed that when students have a limited or distorted understanding of inequity and cultural diversity-understandings it makes it difficult for them to act in favor of truly equitable education.
The findings of this study, specifically from the focus group meeting, acknowledged that the boys were cognizant of their school community and were in the beginning stages of being able to articulate issues of race. It became quite evident that when discussing race at TES it was a difficult subject for them because critiquing their teachers and school was not a normal occurrence for them. What I observed in facilitating the focus group meeting, was not the clear assertion of the participants’ voices in response to the questions, as they had been earlier; rather, what I observed was the silence, and then the discovery and exploration of voice (Smith & Hope, 2020). Two of the participants remained silent throughout that portion of the meeting, while the other three went on to share their thoughts, only after being reassured of the rationale for the question. Like the elementary students in this research study, King wrote of her college-aged pupils “… few of my students even think of disputing this system or see it as disputable” (p. 139). Dysconscious racism was a factor in this study, and continues to be a problem that limits thoughts and actions in schools and beyond.

Based on the participants’ reactions and responses, and the related literature, I feel a promotion of small group sessions or meetings for black boys could be beneficial in their lives. Examples of such groups can be found in *Black Boys: Invisible to Visible (BBI2V)* by authors Clewiston Challenger, Kevin Duquette, and Domonique Pascascio. During four weeks of the sixteen-week program for black boys, participants engage in a topic entitled “Speak My Truth.” This unit teaches group members to use their voices and speak their truth.

Challenger, Duquette, & Pascascio (2020) state:

“Teaching group members to *Speak Their Truth* enables them to define and understand their story and personal journey. This can allow black boys to develop the voice and confidence needed to confront racism and combat discrimination as they develop their
racial identity…. this element gives credence and space to members’ individual and shared stories. Activities conducted under this theme focus on the labels placed on Black boys as well as discussions that allow participants to process their feelings and thoughts regarding race and identity… Group leaders who can skillfully navigate these topics can create a non-judgmental space for members to speak about their experiences in the school and community. Here, members will learn to vocalize times when they have felt dehumanized and made to feel invisible because of their race and gender (p. 263).

Other such programs include the “empowerment club” (Wright & Ford, 2016), *The Young Men’s Empowerment Program* (Kafele, 2012), and several others that have been established to support black boys around the country (Noguera, 2003). Programs like these could be advantageous in TES’ school district. In this particular research study, it could have helped the boys feel a bit more comfortable sharing their experiences with race in their classrooms. By promoting programs, such as these, it demonstrates the value schools and districts place on helping black boys be successful in their educational endeavors.

**School as Family**

Various types of data were collected in this study (questionnaires, journals, and a focus group meeting transcript). Most of the feedback from the boys were favorable in regards to how they felt about Truth Elementary School. All of them felt good about school and had positive responses regarding TES. The participants specified that they felt safe, supported, and cared for. Each of the participants indicated that they felt like they belonged at TES. They stated that if they ever needed help, they could ask teachers, students, janitors, the school nurse, siblings, and their parents. They also stated that their school community encouraged them to do their best.
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs was another framework that informed this study. The hierarchy contains five levels of needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970; Woolfolk, 1998; Jones & Jones, 2004; McLeod, 2020). On several occasions, the participants stated their safety and love/belonging needs were being met at TES. Safety needs are on the second level of the hierarchy, and this level reflects the needs for safety, protection, and stability. Love and belonging needs are located on the third level. They represent the human desire for affectionate relationships with friends, partners, and family. It includes feeling a sense of community and connection.

Wynston shared that he is involved in the flag team, track team, and Jr. Beta Club. He stated that he also won the Chance tournament (a problem-solving physical education event) and Free Throw competition at TES. He said that he is “enjoying 5th grade because you get to be in different groups and you get to have bigger responsible roles in the school.” He also indicated that he is interested in the National Beta Club when he gets to middle school. Wynston’s responses support the literature provided in Chapter 2 about Maslow’s Hierarchy and extracurricular activities and clubs. A few of the ways the hierarchy is applied to schools across the country is through school breakfast and lunch programs (physiological), educators being mandated reporters of neglect and child abuse (safety), and by providing extracurricular activities, clubs, and programs (belonging). There is an abundance of research on students and their need for belonging in school (Jackson et al., 2021; Challenger, Duquette, & Pascascio, 2020; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018, Emdin, 2012, Walker, 2008; Loukas, 2007; Booker, 2006). “Feeling a sense of belonging at school is related to positive academic expectations, stronger motivation, and better grades for ethnic minority students as well as for students with
special academic needs” (Brown, 2019). It is critical that black boys feel like they belong and are accepted in the educational setting.

All of the boys in this study felt the rules at TES were equal and fair for everyone. They also mentioned that good behavior was noticed and recognized at their school. “When you do something good,” “When you are nice to people,” and “When you are not talking while the teacher is talking” were a few of the examples that the respondents shared. Esteem needs are on the fourth level of Maslow’s pyramid. This level includes the need for respect, self-esteem, recognition, feelings of accomplishment, appreciation, and approval from others.

When considering schools, there are numerous adults in the building. Schools consist of administrators, teachers, teaching assistants, office staff, coaches, counselors, nurses, media specialists, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and custodians. These are the many people that students will come into contact with during their school day. “The interactions and experiences that students have in school have enduring impact on their academic success and psychosocial adjustment later on in life” (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). Of the countless employees in a school, each of them serving in their roles is vital because these are the people that students will encounter in their school community on a daily basis. Though there may be certain adults whose roles are more critical to students than others, such as the classroom teacher, they all play a significant part in the lives of children. It is critical that all involved in the schooling and education of black boys encourage and support these students. It makes a difference to them and they are aware, as the findings of this study revealed.

The participants shared an incident of concern regarding the boys’ bathroom on the 5th grade hall at the school. These findings indicated the strong connection several of the boys have with the custodians at TES. After going back and analyzing further data, it was discovered that the
participants mentioned the custodians several times throughout the data collection process. They expressed that they could go to custodians if they needed help. They also mentioned the job of the custodians and the hard work they do to care for the school. During the focus group meeting, Taheed commented “In our bathroom they (peers) had clogged the toilet with tissue and the urinals and overflowed the bathroom and had hot Cheetos all over the floor.” Wynston remarked “I feel like they... they try to make the custodians’ job more harder.” Taheed replied “Yeah, because they have to clean up the lunchroom and then hallways and then they got the bathrooms.” The boys seemed very disturbed by the extra work that was being placed on the custodians on account of their peers.

In black communities, this type of care is known as kinship care. Scannapieco & Jackson (1996) state “People can become part of a family unit or, indeed, form a family unit simply by deciding to live and act toward each other as family.” This rich tradition of kinship care dates back to African history (primarily West African culture) and to slavery in the United States. It was believed that children belonged to, and were the responsibility of the extended family and collective community (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). Hence the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child.” Ware (2006) also discusses this type of care where others “act as the students’ extended family.” She calls it “Other-Mothering.” Epstein (2010) terms schools that exhibit these traits “family-like schools.” She states “Teachers, relatives outside of the immediate family, other families, and members of the community can provide important guidance and encouragement to students. As support from school, family, and community accumulates, significantly more students feel secure and cared for, understand the goals of education, work to achieve to their full potential, build positive attitudes and school behaviors, and stay in school” (Epstein, 2010, p. 83; Bencivenga & Elias, 2003).
In *Hearing Footsteps in the Dark: African American Students' Descriptions of Effective Teachers*, Tyrone Howard (2002) found that teachers who established family, community, and home-like characteristics had a positive affect on student effort, engagement, and achievement. He titled this portion of the article “Making School Seem Like Home.” When making suggestions for classroom practice, he recommended that educators establish and encourage kindred relationships with students.

Similar to kinship care and other-mothering, Howard (2002) stated:

Several of the students commented that they were fond of their teachers because of the ways they resembled mothers or other family members. The students talked about how certain mannerisms, modes of interactions, and phrases were identical to the types of interactions they experienced at home. The interactions between African American children and adults can be unique encounters, which can include a range of exchanges from sarcasm, anger, and resentment to joking, support, and encouragement… According to several students in her classroom, Hazel’s method of interaction was reminiscent of how their parents or other family members address them. Because of the familiarity with such interactions, most of the students appeared to be quite comfortable with these types of interactions with their teachers (p. 433).

When exploring the custom of kinship care, it was found that the individuals that provide this type of care (nurturing and protection) simply see themselves as responding to the needs of the family. Scannapieco & Jackson (1996) noted “African children were valued and viewed as an investment in the future.” Ware (2006) mentioned “The literature on African American communities prior to and after the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954 identifies African American communities that were caring and nurturing to children and committed to the
successful education of African American children… They saw education as an important means for collective advancement in a racially biased country.” As found with this research study, establishing family and kinship care in school is critical to young black boys. All members of a school community must understand the value of kinship care or school as family as a resource for supporting black boys in their education.

It is necessary to note that the participants of this study, viewed TES as a family. They shared their encounters with custodians, teachers, teaching assistants, and administration. Though school systems have a top-down organizational structure (principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, teacher leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, so on and so forth), the participants did not adhere to that system. Instead of the hierarchical view of school personnel, these black boys’ web of support was more spherical or circular, and mixed with a wide variety of school employees. There was no order or structure to it; it was all about relationships.

Creating a web of support is necessary for keeping our black male students engaged in school, even as they progress on into middle and high school (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997, p. 327). Any school personnel can provide kinship care to young black boys. When students, teachers, and all members of a school community view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms (Epstein, 2010; Bencivenga & Elias, 2003). The findings of this study demonstrate that the relationships in a school can go beyond teacher-student to include other faculty and staff members. Therefore, all workers within a school need to recognize their role in helping to build a positive, supportive school community.
On the questionnaire, participants were asked if there was an adult in the school building they could talk to when they were happy and also when they were sad. Three of the five participants named the same teacher. Cairo named his homeroom teacher, who also teaches him Math & Science. He stated “because if somebody do something to me I get mad.” His homeroom teacher has been a support for him when issues arise at school. Christian, who is in the same homeroom as Cairo, also selected this teacher. He said that he can talk to her because she is “a good teacher.” Elliott, who is in a different homeroom, also named this same teacher. She teaches him Math & Science also, just during another class period. Elliott wrote “She likes when I tell her all of the stuff like if I am going out of town.” It is important to note that the teacher of these three
boys is a young, white female that has about 10 years of teaching experience. From the participants’ feedback, she is an effective teacher and has developed caring, trusting relationships with them.

Though nearly 80% of the teachers in public schools during the 17-18 school year were white, according to the *Race and Ethnicity of Public School Teachers and Their Students Data Point 2020* report provided by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the suggestions for becoming a culturally responsive educator are not solely for white teachers. Black life is very diverse, just as it is with other races. Many factors can play a part in this, such as socioeconomic status. In *Radical Care to Let Black Boys Thrive*, Howard & Howard (2021) state “Black life can be vastly different based on environmental context.” Whatever the case, it is vital that teachers get to know their students by showing a genuine interest in them.

**Limitations**

There were several circumstances that limited this work. One limitation to this study was generalizability. The experiences of the five black males in this inquiry may not be generalizable to all black males in elementary schools across the United States. Therefore, detailed descriptions of the site, participants, and the phenomena under study were provided in an effort to allow readers to make their own decisions regarding transferability.

Another limitation was the time frame. This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, multiple interruptions to in-person learning occurred as several students and staff members throughout the school had to quarantine at home. There were also several substitutes at TES during this time. The data collection phase of this study began right before Christmas break. As we returned to school for 2nd semester, after Christmas break, there was a
surge with the Omicron variant of the virus in schools, the community, and beyond. TES and other schools were advised to make preparations to pivot to virtual learning at a moment’s notice per school district leaders.

My role as researcher, and as a member of the TES school community (instructional support Math teacher) was also a limitation. Therefore, I strived to stay aware of and acknowledge my biases. To manage them, I used my researcher’s journal as a tool to check my subjectivity. As researcher and facilitator of this work, I attempted to create an atmosphere of trust. Though that was my intention, the participants may have felt there was a possibility that I would share confidential information because I worked at the school in which I was inquiring about. The participants not feeling they could honestly share with me or telling me what they thought I wanted to hear could be possible shortcomings. Though this study was not without its drawbacks, the benefits far outweigh the limitations that exist.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

After careful analysis of the findings and thoughtful reflection on the literature, the following recommendations were created to offer direction and guidance for future research. To get a more diverse perspective of the issue, future studies may consider expanding the sample size. Opening up to a larger pool of students, for example, including 4th and 5th grade black boys could assist in this area.

Upon reflection it was also noted that the participants of this study enjoyed gathering together, in a small group, for the focus group meeting. For this inquiry, one meeting was scheduled. Though the other data gathering techniques (the questionnaire and journals) allowed for open-ended responses, the participants seemed to respond more during the focus group meeting. The participants’ responses on the questionnaire and in the journals were brief and to
the point; they did not elaborate often. Therefore, for future study, I recommend multiple focus
group meetings and/or individual interviews. These qualitative techniques may offer a deeper
understanding of the participants’ perceptions. From my experience with this study, the
participants seemed to prefer the focus group meeting (speaking) over the questionnaires and
journals (writing).

Future studies could also include various other perspectives. Teachers could be asked about
their experiences teaching black boys and what strategies they have found to be successful. This
data could provide even more insight into the phenomena. To expand this work even further,
future studies may also bring black girls into the conversation to find out their perceptions of
school as well.

**Recommendations for Teachers**

Based on the findings of this study, it would be beneficial for teachers to examine their biases
when it comes to working with black boys (Howard & Howard, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021;
McIntosh et al., 2018; Wright & Counsell, 2018; Freidus & Noguera, 2017; NEA, 2011; Monroe,
2005). As stated in Chapter 2, educators must be mindful and self-assess their attitudes, to get rid
of any barriers or biased practices that may exist, as they seek to help black boys reach their
highest potential. “Implicit bias is an unconscious mental process resulting in feelings and
attitudes about people based on characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, appearance, etc.
These biases are activated involuntarily and without individuals’ awareness or intentional
control. Implicit biases begin to develop at a very young age through exposure to direct and
indirect messages” (Staats, 2014, p. 7; McIntosh et al., 2018). Educators must look inward and
make themselves aware of any shortcomings to become effective educators of black boys.
Teachers must reflect on their teaching practices and strategies. They must seek opportunities to take part in cultural competency training in teaching and learning. “Professional development opportunities for all teachers of young black boys should be developed with a focus on asset-based education, learning style preferences, and curriculum relevance” (Rashid, 2005; Howard & Howard, 2021). Teachers must, then, use what they have learned from these professional development sessions to adjust and inform their practice. They must be receptive to incorporating culturally responsive strategies into their classrooms.

When connecting Critical Race Theory to the teaching of black boys, educators must be open to examining and discussing race and racism in various institutions, especially their schools. It should be used as a tool to impact curriculum, lesson planning, instruction, assessment, relationship-building, school culture and climate, and policies and procedures. When educators integrate CRT into their teaching practice, it helps black boys gain an understanding into their own racial experiences. CRT can be used to develop the racial awareness or critical consciousness of students, and teachers as well.

Critical Race Theory in combination with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, can assist teachers in fostering students’ inquiry, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Culturally responsive teachers support black boys in using the skills they are learning in school to help them solve problems in the school, home, and/or community. Culturally responsive teachers aim to help black boys honor who they are, while simultaneously exposing them to opportunities beyond their own culture. To reach students, teachers must acknowledge and be willing to confront oppression in school and society, which is what CRT is all about.

“Research on culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrates that successful teachers pay careful attention to who their students are, where they come from, and how they learn and interact within
the classroom as they devise strategies to guide children's growth” (Freidus & Noguera, 2017). These educators challenge deficit thinking by “making students’ lives and experiences an explicit part of the curriculum” (Michie, 2007). They don’t ignore or gloss over issues concerning culture and race, they tackle them head on with their students, so that students see them as a willing and caring participant in the learning process.

Utilizing these strategies, could help educators engage students, parents, and the community in more culturally appropriate ways. Students benefit from having “highly qualified culturally responsive teachers” (Wright & Ford, 2016; Kirkland, 2021; Wright & Counsell, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Monroe, 2005). When teachers are given opportunities to strengthen their own learning with ongoing support and resources, the professional growth and gains they make quickly translate to their students. Once teachers understand the role of culture in education and begin incorporating culturally responsive practices in their classrooms, then black boys will start to see the relevance, engage in their learning, and excel in their studies.

Teachers must be open-minded to new techniques that can enhance their teaching practice and improve student performance. “Teachers who respect and invite students’ cultures into the classroom have opportunities to expand the understanding and perspectives of everyone” (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Sometimes teachers struggle with discussions of race and culture in schools, especially when it is connected to current, ongoing inequities in education and society. But, these uncomfortable conversations are the very ones that need to be had, as these discourses could lead to self-reflection and a change of perspective.

Recommendations for Teacher Leaders
Teacher leaders have a vast array of knowledge to share with their colleagues to help them become better educators. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leaders as “teachers who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice.” Teacher leaders can serve as mentors and coaches because they know the school environment and what is needed to help their colleagues and students become successful.

There are many teachers, throughout many school buildings across the nation, who could benefit from cultural competency training, and most times administrators do not have to go far to provide these teachers with the guidance they need. “Teacher leaders lead by example, displaying their practices and influencing other teachers and other educators” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Schools can utilize teacher leaders to assist with building teacher capacity in the area of culture and pedagogy, and various other areas of teaching and learning. By employing the “experts in the building” with assisting their colleagues, this is where meaningful dialogue and growth can take place, and perhaps the gaining of new knowledge, understanding, or perspective. Teacher leaders have the power to transform thinking in an organization. “Many schools see teaching African American boys as a daunting challenge” (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Kafele, 2012). Culturally responsive teacher leaders within a school can assist with meeting this challenge. These teacher leaders have had success working with black boys and their families, and would be the best suited for this task. They could share best practices with colleagues to address the learning styles of black boys and culturally responsive disciplinary strategies (Monroe, 2005; McIntosh et al., 2018; Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Ware, 2006; Howard, 2002). They could even offer culturally responsive models of parent and family engagement (Grant & Ray, 2019). When teachers involve the parents and family of culturally and linguistically diverse families, “it
positively impacts the students’ academic and social success” (Levin & Schrum, 2017). Parents and families are interested in their child’s education, though they may not demonstrate it in the traditional ways that educators are used to seeing parental involvement. Nevertheless, teachers must connect and reach out in unconventional ways they may not be accustomed to, and teacher leaders can assist in this area as well.

Teacher leaders can assist schools and districts with studying inequities that may be present in their institutions, and helping to create policies and procedures along with professional development to address these issues (see Appendix J). They should also seek opportunities to lead efforts pertaining to the teaching and learning of diverse learners, in this case – black boys. “In collegial cultures, teachers take collective responsibility for helping all of their colleagues to become better teachers and for the growth and development of all students” (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2018). By engaging in this work, teacher leaders will assist with broadening their colleagues understanding of how black boys learn best. The professional development they provide can help prepare and support their colleagues with becoming culturally competent educators, which begins with addressing any deficit thinking or views they may have about black boys.

In I’m Here for the Hard Re-Set: Post Pandemic Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture Ladson-Billings (2021) stated:

“Far too many teachers believe if they make some effort to represent diverse cultures, they are exhibiting cultural competence. Cultural competence means that students are secure in their knowledge and understanding of their own culture—language, traditions, histories, culture, and so forth, AND are developing fluency and facility in at least one
other culture. In the case of minoritized students that other culture is typically the mainstream culture” (p. 71).

Ongoing, consistent professional learning would allow teachers to better understand the influence culture has on learning. As teachers’ knowledge gets strengthened, and they implement new strategies and techniques in their own classrooms, they will begin to get a better understanding of what black boys need to learn and thrive. These valuable growth opportunities could be the start to providing equity and making learning more accessible to all in the organization.

The role of teacher leaders as change agents is also necessary. They can serve as advocates for children by bringing the urgent need for change to the attention of their colleagues. Advocacy is defined as “the process of supporting a person, group, cause, idea, or policy, and benefits individual children and groups of children and families” (Grant & Ray, 2019). Teacher leaders must be willing to advocate for black boys and their families to improve their outcomes.

There are a variety of ways in which teacher leaders can advocate for change. The targeted audience could include any of the following: principals, colleagues, parents, the school board, the superintendent, the mayor, the newspaper, the dean of the school of education at the local university, the state board of education, the state superintendent, the governor, and/or any legislators or policymakers (local, state, and national) that the advocate deems necessary. Teacher leaders can provide valuable insight into how schools and districts can better meet the needs and improve academic outcomes for black boys.

It is imperative for teacher leaders to learn to speak up and voice their concerns about policy issues that affect them, their students and their communities. “Teachers’ voices are often silent,
yet their perspectives need to be heard by all stakeholders attempting to improve schools. Their voices and perspectives must be heard at the local, state, and national levels in regards to educational policies if we are to see improvement in student achievement. Ultimately, this work has the potential to make a difference in the bottom line – student learning” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 102). There are several resources available to assist teacher leaders with developing and building their advocacy skills. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development - Advocacy Guide, is one such resource, that provides information teacher leaders can use to influence policymakers, the media, and the community. Teacher leaders must be invested in advocating for the improvement of the educational conditions that impact black boys (Kirkland, 2017; NEA, 2011). This work could ultimately improve their life trajectory.

Advocacy can be a slow process, but well worth it if it will benefit students and communities. “The strongest potential for advocacy is within teachers themselves, and the solutions rely on the deliberate actions of teacher leaders who are realistic about the current problems and potential obstacles yet still find ways to work with their colleagues and others in productive ways” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Bradley-Levine, 2018). Change is inevitable, especially in the field of education, and who better to have their voices heard than the individuals in the “trenches.” The people with the knowledge, skills, expertise, and perspectives on what works in schools.

Recommendations for School and District Leaders

Just as suggested for teachers and teacher leaders, school and district leaders need to check their biases, as well, when working with black boys (Howard & Howard, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021; McIntosh et al., 2018; Wright & Counsell, 2018; Freidus & Noguera, 2017; Capper, 2015; NEA, 2011; Monroe, 2005). Educators must reflect inward on their beliefs, ideas, and practices. They
must critically examine their own culture and subjectivity, and how that relates to black boys. They must acknowledge any barriers or biased practices that may exist within their hearts, minds, and institutions. This is the first step to becoming a more effective leader.

School and district leaders should also recognize and accept that there may be a critical need to support black boys in their education. To improve the achievement of black boys in schools, leaders must take a critical look at the school and/or district data (academic, behavioral, attendance, etc.) to determine how black boys are developing and progressing in their schools. Once the data has been analyzed, possible root causes need to be discussed, and action steps should be developed for moving forward. As action steps are brainstormed and established, leaders, diverse teachers, parents, and student representatives need to be brought to the table to join forces in this effort. This is a meaningful way to collaborate and engage with those who have a vested interest in the education of children.

Professional development opportunities, collaboration, coaching, and mentoring are all possibilities that can be established to assist faculty and staff in the implementation of best practices when educating black boys.

Monroe (2005) states that leaders should:

“…provide opportunities for teachers to interrogate their beliefs about African American students. Racial and gender stereotypes often undergird teachers’ interactions with students. As a result, many teachers, consciously or unconsciously, believe that boys present more disciplinary problems than girls, and that black students are more likely to misbehave than youths of other races” (p. 47).
Leaders must be open and willing to devote time, resources, and effort into this endeavor. “Teachers who are provided training and experience in various forms of diversity are likely to be more appreciative of differences and empathetic to the experiences and needs of their students and their families” (Whitford & Addis, 2017; Gay, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Schools and districts must equip teachers with research-based practices proven to work with black boys. They must provide teachers with multiple opportunities to build their capacity in the area of cultural responsiveness because transformation does not take place with one workshop or training.

By utilizing a shared leadership approach, faculty and staff who have success working with black boys and their families could assist in this area by imparting valuable knowledge to their colleagues. These culturally responsive teacher leaders can offer best practices to fellow educators for working with black boys. School and district leaders should promote and be supportive of these teacher leaders.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) states:

The success of teacher leadership depends on the context in which it takes place. School leaders with exemplary schools make teacher leadership a priority and take risks to provide teacher leaders what they need to succeed. This does not happen by chance; it is a conscious effort by these leaders to design an environment that is supportive of all learning, including teacher leadership development” (p. 98).

When school and district leaders take part in shared or distributive leadership, it fosters the leadership of others in the building. It can create an atmosphere where educators work and learn together, and reflect on ways to achieve a common goal. Teacher leaders can thrive, if they are
supported by shared, distributed leadership from their administrators. When leaders distribute their power, it allows teacher leaders to share their skills, knowledge, and experience with others to improve instructional practices. When implemented effectively, this ultimately leads to student growth and achievement, and a building of teacher capacity (Cassata & Allensworth, 2021; Levin & Schrum, 2017; The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, 2015; Danielson, 2007; Danielson, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Teacher leaders, with the support of their school administration, have the ability to make a powerful impact in their schools, districts, and beyond.

Student perception data regarding school climate and various areas of education are also critical to understanding where possible changes need to be made. “There is a need to consult with young people on how the structure and culture of schools contribute to low academic achievement and to enlist their input when interventions to improve student performance are being designed and implemented” (Noguera, 2007; Noguera, 2003; Duncan, 2002). This student data can be used as a means to ensure school and district efforts are focused in the right direction. It may be compared from one year to another or every two to three years, whatever the school/district feels would be most beneficial. The data would show leaders what was working and what was in need of improvement. The goal is to get a clear understanding of how students perceive their schooling environment. Adult perceptions and student perceptions in a school may vary greatly, the only way to be certain of the student perspective is to allow their voices to be heard. The “UNCF challenges stakeholders to take the time listen to African American students, believe what they are saying about their educational environments and most importantly act to ensure that all students receive the high-quality education they deserve” (UNCF, 2018). By allowing students the opportunity to share their perspectives, it demonstrates the value school
and district leaders place on establishing an inviting school climate. Finding ways to strengthen a school’s climate is a continuous, necessary process.

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (2017) states:

“Improving school climate is not something that happens overnight. It is not a project that you can do once and then move on. Rather, improving school climate is an ongoing process, one that takes time and requires the support of everyone in the building, including students” (p. 1).

Leaders must regularly reassess their school’s climate, as the student population continually changes. All of the suggestions shared above are critical to creating a positive, safe, supportive environment for black boys.

**Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs**

College and university teacher preparation programs must take the time to modify their courses and learning experiences for aspiring teachers to reflect the cultural diversity present in 21st century schools. They must provide opportunities for apprentice teachers to take part in conversations on culture, race, and pedagogy. “Prospective teachers need both an intellectual understanding of schooling and inequity as well as self-reflective, transformative emotional growth experiences” (King, 1991, p. 134). As students engage in these critical reflections, the goal is to gain self-awareness regarding culture, race, and their positionality in society. These programs should address how to engage and educate black males, as well as other diverse learners. “Teaching black males requires the recognition of race and racism and how it impacts their lives” (Howard & Lyons, 2021). Teacher preparation programs must also train their students to be socially conscious and advocates of change. This coursework could broaden their
understanding of culture and its impact on education. To accomplish these objectives, teacher preparation programs must first recruit and hire faculty and staff who are knowledgeable in the areas of cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Personal Reflection**

The boys in this study welcomed the opportunity to talk about their experiences at TES. They eagerly anticipated our time together and wanted additional time for discussions. At the end of the data collection phase, Wynston stayed after the group was dismissed and thanked me for the opportunity to be a part of this experience. From my observations and the boys’ feedback, they wanted more chances like this to share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings in a small group setting of their peers.

When I often saw them in the halls, they wanted to know if we would gather together again to meet. They looked forward to the social connection and time to converse about their elementary years. They seemed to value the opportunity to share their voice. The time spent with these boys while conducting this study and the days thereafter in the halls, with them requesting additional time, allowed me to see just how imperative gathering together and communing was for them. Allowing them the time to share was not just beneficial to me, the researcher, but also for them. This study provided the space for the boys to engage in open, honest dialogue regarding their schooling experiences at TES.

Collaborating with the young men in this study was a refreshing experience that took me away from the disheartening statistics surrounding black boys in U.S. public schools. This work reminded me that we must do all that we can to not “dim or extinguish” these bright lights
Conducting this research study on the education of black boys, humanized the numbers for me.

My work with these participants has allowed me to conclude that there is a need to provide opportunities for black boys to gather together and talk. These groups could be facilitated by teacher leaders and/or school counselors. The groups could provide a space where black boys feel as if they are seen and valued. They could assist with keeping the boys focused and motivated. By building this network of peers, it could provide a means of support for them, especially as they prepare to transition into middle school. As the boys get older, these groups could be invaluable to them as they grow to understand some of the microaggressions, stereotypes, and disparities they will face in schools and society; as CRT suggests “racism always has been and always will be endemic and pervasive in society” (Tate, 1997; Capper, 2015). These groups could give black boys someone to identify with and to assist in their personal and academic development.

For the majority of the boys in this study, they will attend the same neighborhood middle and high schools. By establishing groups, such as these, educators could support them in building relationships that could last a lifetime. Promotion of these groups would demonstrate the value schools place on helping their black boys be successful in their educational endeavors.

**Conclusions**

“Challenging the structures of domination in schools begins with an invitation to young black males to speak their piece and with our willingness to see the world through their eyes, the way it is, rather than the way we think it is or want it to be” (Duncan, 2002).

This chapter concludes the research on five black boys and their perceptions of their elementary school. This journey of inquiry was a way for the participants’ voices to be heard.
It was an opportunity for their stories to be lifted up. By taking part in this research study, the participants helped to provide critical insights into the educational experiences of young black boys in a suburban elementary school.

The five participants were very knowledgeable about TES and were able to clearly articulate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Each of the boys had been enrolled at TES for 5 years or longer, and in a matter of weeks would be heading off to middle school. Soo-Hoo (1993) as cited in Howard (2002) stated “We listen to outside experts to inform us, and consequently we overlook the treasure in our very own backyards: our students” (p. 390). The participants’ perceptions were invaluable to this work because it provided a view that is not often presented: the elementary black male. This study contributes to the field of research by addressing the young black male perspective. Educators must listen to these students and hear what they are saying, if they aspire to create equitable schools for all.

Despite the daunting statistics surrounding black boys, this work has helped to shift the narrative or “build a better narrative” for black boys regarding their education (Anderson, 2016; UNCF, 2018). According to the findings of this study, building relationships & classroom communities, exhibiting care, compassion, & high expectations, planning engaging instruction, managing the classroom effectively, having awareness of societal issues, such as race and how it plays a role in education, and supporting the school as family are all essential to the success of black boys in elementary school.

All invested in the education of black boys must take heed and listen as they share their wants and needs in the school setting. “The school system and individuals who work within the school system have a responsibility to attend to the needs of Black male students. A school system should direct their attention to school climate and see if it is creating a safe space for Black
males” (Jackson et al., 2021). After studying the statistics, reading the literature, and listening to adult perspectives on the topic, it was refreshing to hear from those most impacted by the phenomena. The five participants of this study provided first-hand knowledge about their experiences. The knowledge gained can be used to begin dialogue on how to best educate black boys. This work could assist stakeholders such as teachers, teacher leaders, school and district leaders, and teacher preparation programs with the adjustments needed to ensure they are addressing the needs of black boys in elementary schools.
References

Allen, Q. (2015). I’m trying to get my A: Black male achievers talk about race, school and achievement. The Urban Review, 47(1), 1-23. doi: 10.1007/s11256-014-0315-4


doi:10.1080/1360311970010106


doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.81777


https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/84028/EducatingBlackBoys.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y


Appendix A

TES ELA Data 2019
Appendix B

TES Math Data 2019
Appendix C

Qualitative Questionnaire

Self

1. Tell me about yourself. What words would you use to describe yourself?
2. Tell me about the things you like to do. Why?
3. How do you feel about 5th grade so far? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Others

4. What does your teacher expect from you as a student?
5. Does your teacher create a classroom environment that helps you feel comfortable and allows you to do your best work? What makes you feel that way?
6. Do you think your teachers care about you? What do they do to make you think that?
7. Do you think your principals care about you? What do they do to make you think that?
8. Are there times when you really need your teachers to care about you? When are those times?
9. What could your teachers and principals do to help you be the best student you can be?

Classroom/School

10. What are your favorite things about this school?
11. What do you dislike about this school?
12. What is your favorite subject in school? Why?
13. What is your least favorite subject? Why?
14. What do you do when you become frustrated while learning?
15. Is good behavior noticed at this school? (Give an example)
16. Do you feel successful in school? Why or why not?
17. Do you like classroom activities that you do on your own or with others? Why?
18. What classroom activities do you enjoy most?
19. Which classroom activities do you least enjoy?
20. Who or what motivates you to do well in school?
21. Is there an adult in the school building that you talk to when you are happy? Who? Why?
22. Is there an adult in the school building that you talk to when you are sad? Who? Why?
Appendix D

Student Journal Prompts

_Students will respond to some of the following prompts in their journals:_

1. How would you describe yourself as a student in the classroom? What are you like? (You may draw a picture to go with your response if you like)
2. What’s the best thing about your class?
3. What’s the worst thing about your class?
4. Do you think the rules at your school are fair? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel safe at school? Why or why not?
6. Do your teachers tell you about their life outside of school? Do you like it? Why?
7. Do your teachers ask you questions about your life outside of school? Do you like it? Why?
8. Tell me about your best day at TES.
9. Tell me about your worst day at TES.
10. Describe your favorite teacher at TES? What is he or she like? (Do not give names)
11. Describe your least favorite teacher at TES? What is he or she like? (Do not give names)
12. How do you define success?
13. What do you need to be successful in school?
14. Do you feel like this school is preparing you to be successful in middle school? Why or why not?
15. What are your goals for this 21-22 school year?
16. What are your goals after high school? What do you want to do or be when you grow up?
17. How do you think school can help you accomplish this goal for your future?
18. Do you feel school does a good job of preparing you for your future? Why or why not?
19. What challenges do you have in school?
20. What are some things that stop you from learning or achieving academic success in school?
21. Where can you go for help?
22. Do you feel cared for and supported at TES? Why or why not?
23. If you were principal, what would you say is working well at your school? Why?
24. If you were principal, what would you say is not working well at your school? Why?
25. What do you think can improve the learning environment for you at TES?
Appendix E

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. What do you like most about TES?
2. What frustrates you about TES?
3. Are you able to be the best student you can be in your classroom? Why or why not - 
   What are some things that stop or hinder you from learning?
4. What classroom activities help you learn in class? (lectures, discussions, working in 
   groups, projects, visuals, etc…)
5. Are you treated differently in school than other students? Why do you feel that way?
6. Do you think teachers care more about some students than others? Why or why not? If 
   so, what kind of students do teachers care more about? Less about? Follow-up questions: 
   “Do teachers care more about girls vs. boys? White vs. students of color? Smart vs. not 
   smart? Rich vs. poor? Kids who need special help vs. kids who don’t? Kids who are 
   popular vs. kids who aren’t? 
7. Do you feel like you belong at TES? Why?
8. Do you feel like you can ask for help if you need it? Who can you ask?
9. Research says some black boys do not perform well in school. What stops some black 
   boys from doing well in school?
10. How could we fix that problem so that the research findings improve for black boys?
    What strategies or solutions do you have to help other black boys be successful in 
    school?
11. If you could change one thing about your school, your classroom, or your teachers, what 
    would it be? Why?
12. If you could tell teachers how to be more caring towards black boys, what would you tell 
    them?

Before we conclude this meeting, is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your participation.
Appendix F

School District Approval to Conduct Research

August 23, 2021

Dear Erica Peek,

I am pleased to inform you that your request to conduct your research topic *Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students: A School Climate Study* has been approved with certain stipulations outlined below. This authorization simply means that you are able to continue to conduct your research as described in your documentation submitted.

Stipulations of this approval include:

- For purposes of this specific research, please make certain that you clearly identify yourself in your capacity as a researcher rather than as an agent of the [redacted].
- Further, you will need to work closely with the building-level supervisors to ensure that:
  - Instructional time is not being negatively impacted; and,
  - School personnel are not being subjected to undo burdens as a result of this research being conducted.

Please note that the [redacted] follows these general procedural guidelines:

1. Research that is approved by the Department of Student Services does not guarantee that schools, departments, school personnel, parents, students, community leaders, others, etc. will participate. Participation is strictly voluntary and should be neither expected nor anticipated. Each entity will need to agree to participate, and they have every right to decline to do so without consequence;
2. No research involving [redacted] students will be approved without the express written consent of Parent/Guardian. In other words, Parent/Guardian must “opt-in”- in writing prior to being included in any outside research;
3. No research will be approved that interferes with instructional time;
4. The district will assume no responsibility for accepting, disseminating, collecting, warehousing, and/or forwarding of any materials for researcher;
5. All costs associated with approved research are the sole responsibility of the researcher;
6. No [redacted] equipment or resources are to be used to facilitate your research. These include (but are not limited to):
   a. Email;
   b. Fax Machines;
   c. Copiers;
   d. Phones/Long Distance;
   e. General Office Supplies;
   f. Postage;
   g. Stationary/Letterhead.
7. A copy of the approved research proposal and completed research is kept on file at the Department of Student Services for review;
8. Once research proposals are approved, any modifications to the approved methods, research instruments, populations, score, etc. are to be immediately brought to the attention of the Department of Student Services prior to continuing with said research;
9. Parents and staff members shall have the right to inspect such studies, and materials used in connection with such studies, on request;
10. Any data collection, reporting, and/or related research activity undertaken within, or by the [redacted] shall protect the privacy of students, parents, and employees;
11. Researchers are required to submit electronic copies of their competed research to the Department of Student Services upon successful completion of their defenses;
12. The [redacted] reserves the right to revoke Research Approval at any time. For your information, the Student Services Office is maintaining a copy of your approved research application which is available for review by [redacted] personnel.

I wish you much success with your research!

Yours most truly,

[signature]

[redacted]
Assistant Director of Student Services
Appendix G

KSU IRB Approval

Dec 8, 2021 12:15:08 PM EST

Erica Peek
EDU-Educational Leadership, EDU-Elam & Early Childhood

Re: Initial - IRB-FY22-161 - Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students: A School Climate Study

Dear Erica Peek:

On December 8, 2021 the KSU IRB approved the above referenced submission per 45 CFR 46.110 and 46.111. The research must be conducted in accordance with the approved protocol. In conducting this research, subjects must be consented using the proposed and approved consent process and date stamped consent forms found in "attachments" on the main study workspace. Any changes to the project must be submitted as a modification and receive approval prior to implementing. Records relating to research which is conducted shall be retained for at least three years after completion of the research. Research records are to be accessible for inspection and copying by authorized representatives of the department or agency at reasonable times and in a reasonable manner. When the project is completed, a study closure request must be submitted. If project remains active as of December 8, 2023, a progress report will be requested.

Review Categories cited: Expedited 6, 7

Findings: This study meets the criteria for permissible research with children as set forth at 45 CFR 46.404. One parent or guardian signed permission is sufficient to enroll minor subjects. Parent or guardian permission must be obtained, as well as assent of the child, as per 45 CFR 46.408/21 CFR 50.55.

Notes for Researchers: Minor changes were made to the parental permission form. Please use the date stamped version found under the tab labeled "attachments" on the Study Details or the Submission Details page.

Sincerely,
Kennesaw State University IRB
Appendix H

KSU IRB Modification Approval

Dec 15, 2021 5:02:11 PM EST

Erica Peek
EDU-Educational Leadership, EDU-Elem & Early Childhood

Re: Modification - IRB-FY22-161 Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students: A School Climate Study

Dear Erica Peek:

The Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board has approved the changes requested for Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students: A School Climate Study.

Findings: Minor modification to study instrument. The change does not affect the review category nor the risk determination. Changes to the study instrument are approved as proposed.

Notes for Researcher:

Sincerely,
Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board
Appendix I

Permission for Protocol (Question) Usage

[EXTERNAL] Re: Request for Research Study Protocol Use
Aaron Jeffrey <aaronjeffrey@weber.edu>
Thu 9/16/2021 10:01 AM
To: Erica Peek <epeek5@students.kennesaw.edu>
Hi Erica,

I'm glad those questions were helpful. Your study sounds awesome. Please feel free to use any questions you'd like. Best of luck with your research.

Aaron

On Thu, Sep 16, 2021 at 7:15 AM Erica Peek <epeek5@students.kennesaw.edu> wrote:
Good morning Mr. Jeffrey,
Thank you once again for sharing your focus group questions with me. I truly appreciate it. Now that I have had the opportunity to read through them, I believe that several of them may be beneficial to my doctoral research. I am conducting a qualitative study entitled Perceptions of School Through the Lens of Black Male Elementary Students: A School Climate Study. Is it possible that I can get your permission to use some of your questions for my study? I will be sure to cite my source and give credit to your work. Thanks again for your time and consideration.

Erica Peek

From: Erica Peek <epeek5@students.kennesaw.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, September 14, 2021 2:08 PM
To: Aaron Jeffrey <aaronjeffrey@weber.edu>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Email from Campus Directory

Thank you Mr. Jeffrey for the quick response! I was hoping I had the correct "Aaron Jeffrey", as I see you are no longer at Minnesota State University. I can't wait to dig into this resource.

Thanks again,
Erica Peek

From: Aaron Jeffrey <aaronjeffrey@weber.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, September 14, 2021 1:10 PM
To: Erica Peek <epeek5@students.kennesaw.edu>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Email from Campus Directory

Hi Erica,

Thanks for reaching out. I have attached the focus group questions we used for different grades we interviewed. Hope this is helpful.

Take care,

Aaron

Aaron Jeffrey, Ph.D., LMFT
Associate Director of Clinical Services
Counseling and Psychological Services Center
Phone: 801-626-6406
https://www.weber.edu/CounselingCenter/

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On Tue, Sep 14, 2021 at 10:00 AM <epeek5@students.kennesaw.edu> wrote:

Morning Mr. Jeffrey, My name is Erica Peek and I am a graduate student at Kennesaw State University. I was reading over the article "If We’re Ever in Trouble They’re Always There: A Qualitative Study of Teacher-Student Caring." I am interested in the full set of focus group questions that were utilized for this study. I noted that you were the contact person for all correspondence. Is this correct? Are you able to assist me with this? Any guidance that you can provide will be appreciated. Thanks, Erica Peek

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Aaron

**Aaron Jeffrey, Ph.D., LMFT**  
Associate Director of Clinical Services  
Counseling and Psychological Services Center  
Phone: 801-626-6406  
https://www.weber.edu/CounselingCenter/

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![Weber State University Logo]

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Sample Professional Development Outline for Teacher Leaders

**Title:**
Cultivating Culturally Competent Teachers

**Professional Learning Goal:**
The aim is to build teachers’ cultural competency in the classroom, specifically when working with black boys. The intention is to support teachers in creating inclusive learning environments and applying culturally responsive strategies in the classroom. By the end of the sessions, teachers should have an understanding of how Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) can be used as tools in their classrooms/schools to assist black boys in their educational endeavors.

**What:**
This professional development opportunity will address the needs of black boys. Key concepts such as CRT and CRP, and their application in the classroom will be the focus. Teachers will be provided with multiple opportunities to share their views and experiences, as well as be exposed to the experiences and approaches of culturally diverse others. The goal is to challenge deficit thinking that may exist. During this workshop, problems will be posed, ideas shared, and curriculum developed.

**Who:**
Open to all educators!

**Where:**
At the school site
**when:**
Each 1st & 3rd Tuesday of the Fall semester 3:30 – 5:00 pm

**why:**
This professional development is being conducted in an effort to assist educators with examining and discussing race and racism in various institutions, especially their schools. CRT is presently a hot topic in society. With that being the case, educators should not try to run away from the issue of race in schools. They should join the conversation and they will find that CRT can actually be beneficial and used as a tool to impact curriculum, lesson planning, instruction, assessment, relationship-building, school culture and climate, and policies and procedures.

**how:**
This workshop will be facilitated by teacher leaders that have been successful working with black boys and their families. They will impart valuable knowledge by sharing their expertise. They will also equip teachers with research-based practices proven to have an impact on black boys.

**Learning Outcomes:**
Develop educator knowledge of Critical Race Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Develop application of Critical Race Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Development of (more) culturally competent educators

**Learning Activities:**

A top priority of this workshop is to **collaboratively establish meeting norms** to build respect and trust. Throughout this professional development, critical conversations will take place. Open, honest dialogue and inquiry will be encouraged. By setting norms in advance, this should allow for deeper understanding and clarity throughout the process. Facilitators will work to **build a supportive environment** where everyone feels safe to have mutually respectful conversations. If disrespect or conflict arises, a “norms check” may be referenced.
- Facilitators will guide participants in **studying inequities** that may be present in their institution. Participants will engage in **analyzing school data** (academic, behavioral, attendance, perception for ex. *school climate surveys,* etc.) to determine how black boys are developing and progressing in their school. This will allow participants to understand the need for the professional development. At this point, they should **recognize and accept** that there may be a critical need, within the institution, to support black boys in their education. Participants will also collaborate to discuss **possible root causes.**

- Facilitators will support participants in **developing their awareness** of themselves and others that are unlike them, in regards to race and culture. Participants will engage in **examining biases and reflecting on beliefs, ideas, and practices,** specifically when it comes to working with black boys. Participants will **critically reflect** on their teaching practices and strategies. Facilitators will guide this process of conscious reflection with the use of a variety of teaching strategies, for example by asking probing questions, it encourages the participants to think critically about their practices and their world. By listening and collaborating in this way, it allows participants to hear alternative views from their own; counter-stories or counter-narratives, a CRT component. This would also be a beneficial strategy for the participants to use in the classroom with their own students.

- Facilitators will continue to encourage participants to **challenge deficit thinking** by making their students’ lives and experiences a part of the curriculum. They will urge participants to not ignore or gloss over issues concerning culture and race in their classrooms and community, but to tackle them head on with their students. Participants will find that they can be examples or models to their students. They can assist students in **examining systems and advocating for better** (another CRT component) by having them look at a variety of perspectives and experiences, and having them dig deeper into what they see taking place in the world. Facilitators will share various ways in which **CRT in combination with CRP** can assist teachers with fostering their students’ inquiry, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

- Facilitators will **share best practices** to address the learning styles of black boys and culturally responsive instructional and disciplinary strategies. They will promote black boys’ assets, rather than deficits. Facilitators will guide and assist participants in seeing the role culture plays in education. The goal is to help black boys honor who they are, while simultaneously exposing them to opportunities beyond their own culture. Culturally responsive models of parent and family engagement will also be offered.

- Participants will be reassured that **incorporating culturally responsive practices** into their repertoire will enhance their teaching practice and improve student performance. Participants may begin to realize that these practices allow the learning to become more real and relevant to their students. Participants will be encouraged to pay careful attention to who their students are, where they come from, and how they learn and interact within the classroom as they devise strategies to guide
their growth. Participants will be provided with sample scenarios and collaborate with their groups to figure out various ways to incorporate components of CRT and/or CRP into those areas. Finally, teachers will **develop their own individual action steps** for moving forward in their classrooms.

* This workshop will include readings of various materials (scholarly journal articles, research, blogs, etc.), viewing (film, video clips, etc.), discussions, collaboration, creation of products to demonstrate knowledge (lesson plans, etc.)

* Participants will also be encouraged to “show and tell” any additional valuable resources and/or experiences they are knowledgeable of and want to share pertaining to the topic.

** To encourage continuous growth and improvement, after Fall semester, additional collaboration, coaching, and mentoring will be offered. This will provide multiple opportunities for educators to build their capacity in the area of cultural responsiveness.

---

**Teacher Leadership**

“Growing evidence supports the view that school inequities involving African Americans are best addressed through race-conscious approaches at the teacher preparation and professional development levels. Providing opportunities for teachers to interrogate their own beliefs about student groups as well as culturally based expectations are powerful means of shifting present trends in disproportionality. To date, there is mounting evidence that culturally responsive teachers, particularly African American practitioners, play pivotal roles in promoting transformative outcomes among students. School systems would be well served to employ such individuals in leadership roles that enable them to mentor practicing colleagues as well as to have a voice in decision-making.”

(Monroe, 2005, p. 49)